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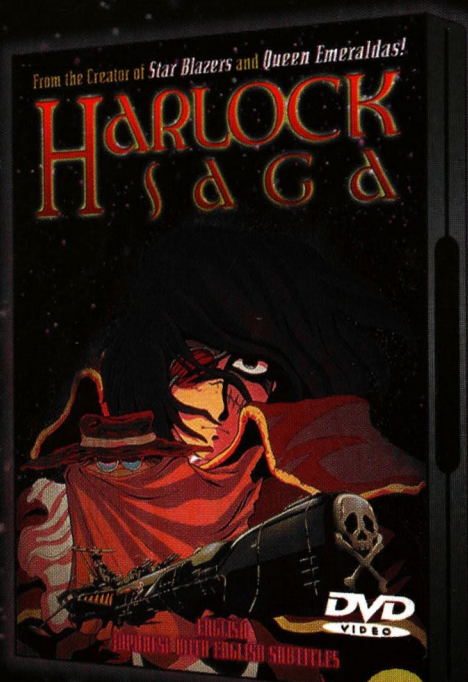
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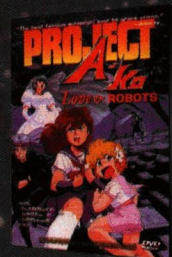


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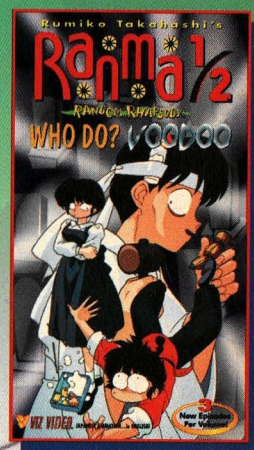
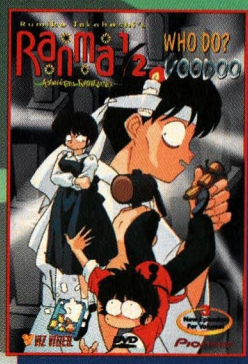
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Kurouni Kenshin legend of kyoto

Ice Blue Eyes

As the ambitious Shishio circles Japan in flames, Kenshin is forced to leave behind everything he loves and become a wanderer once again. After joining forces with Misao Makimachi, a young ninja and member of the Oniwaban group, Kenshin comes across a rural area, which has already fallen into Shishio's iron grip. This new villain controls the villages with public executions and random acts of terror, while Kenshin finds himself drawn closer and closer to the true heart of darkness. As he faces off with Shishio and the boy assassin, another opponent reappears after a long absence. It's a relentless warrior with a heart of ice, and no hopes or dreams other than to defeat Kenshin!

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When Auden Reiter (Spotlight: *Magic User's Club*) isn't selling graphical literature to the social elite, he spends his time riding the sidereal strings and composing the chaos of his mind into vaguely artistic works of storytelling. He has recently completed his full cyborg conversion only to find that they don't make batteries in his size.



Assistant Editor Patrick Macias (Spotlight: *Jin-Roh*, Toy Boy) enjoys the view down the scope of a G36 assault rifle, à la Golgo 13, while he plays endless games of *Quake Urban Terror* with his buddies/bitter archenemies in Viz Shop-By-Mail. Now if only he could finish that book he's been endlessly working on (*TokyoScope: The Japanese Cult Film Companion*, set to be published Fall 2001). Did some one mutter "juss one more game"?



Toshifumi Yoshida (ANIMERICA Interview: Mamoru Oshii) has a more hectic schedule than ever these days, but he still finds the time to form one half of the Viz Wrestling Federation's own version of the Dudley Boyz and sample rare vintage scotch.



British-based freelancer Andrew Osmond (Spotlight: *Panda! Go, Panda!*) has interviewed numerous animators and authors, and is grateful for having an easier job than either. Having visited Ghibli to report on the upcoming studio museum, he's determined to get to the opening in Japan this October. His main dread: getting hopelessly lost in Ikebukuro station. Proudest possession: a cute'n'cuddly plush deer bought on Miya-jima Island.

SAILOR MOON BLUES

A few issues back, we announced that ANIMERICA would be producing, as the next entry in its lineup of "ANIMERICA Special" issues, following our previous *ANIMERICA Special: The World of Gundam*, a special issue on the ever-popular series *Sailor Moon*. Good news, right? Well, now here's the bad news.

It's not going to happen.

At least not for awhile.

Every now and again, we get questions from readers about how the magazine is put together (typically from those with a school report staring them in the face), but most people seem content to just get their magazine and not worry too much about what goes on behind the scenes. And that's as it should be—I mean, who cares as long as you get it, right? In this case, however, I think you deserve an explanation.

ANIMERICA has no particular boundaries in terms of content—no one tells us how to write the magazine or dictates what we can or can't say—but when it comes to using copyrighted images of various anime and manga titles, it's another story.

ANIMERICA is published by Viz Communications, the same company that produces translated comics, books, videos, and films through its various divisions (Viz Comics, Viz Video, et. al.). There are of course advantages to being associated with a company with good connections to Japanese publishers. We can, for example, sometimes gain access to artists for interviews that would be very hard to reach otherwise. But there are also disadvantages to this arrangement, and our *Sailor Moon Special* ran straight up against one.

Since we are published by a company that deals with Japan on a regular basis, we have to do things the Japanese way when it comes to arranging for permission to use images, especially for large projects, such as our Specials. In Japanese publications, the norm would be to get specific permission for each image, each time. In most cases, simply the fact that we ask for this permission means that we get respect for doing things the right way, but in this case, we ran up against unexpected rights complications. It's no one's fault, but it does mean that we can't do the *Sailor Moon Special* after all. At least not right now.

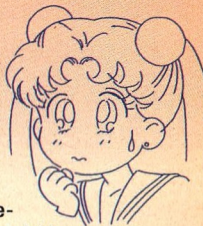
What can we say? This sucks, we know a lot of you will be very disappointed, and we hate having to flake out on publishing something we've been promising for months. Believe me when I say this hurts me as much as it does you, especially after all the late nights and weekends I and others have put in getting the extra work done.

But we haven't given up yet. Rest assured, when the situation changes (and we're hoping it will), you'll be the first to know.

Julie Davis
 Editor in Chief



Whatever happened to our *Sailor Moon Special*?



Sailor Moon © Naoko Takeuchi/Kodansha • Toei Animation

Language Key

How do we decide how to "spell" Japanese words in English? There are several systems for "romanizing" the Japanese language into English; ANIMERICA uses a modified Hepburn system, using the French *circumflex* to indicate doubled vowel sounds (e.g. "û" instead of "uu"). Modern proper names of Japanese origin (post-Meiji era) are presented in the Western style, with the given name followed by the family name, typically without diacritical marks in standard U.S. newspaper style, unless a specific spelling is requested by the individual, or is otherwise noted. For consistency's sake, characters appearing in manga and anime are referred to by the names used in their most common U.S.-licensed versions, unless otherwise noted.

The Magic User's Club

Wouldn't you join? Power is in the hands of youth in this series of magical adventure, teen comedy, and adolescent angst. By **Auden Reiter**

We all remember clubs from high school and college. My friends and I started one for all the geeks who wanted to play *Dungeons & Dragons* and *Battletech* at our East Coast Podunk high school. Normally these hobbies made us targets, but getting our picture into the senior yearbook was enough social validation to make up for all the years of rotten teenage mocking.

The Chess Club, Drama Club, Computer Club, and so on. All these organizations got us away from the drudgery of high school class work and allowed us to socialize with our peers who had similar interests.

So let's pretend that magic does exist, that it can be focused into a usable force by our wills and used to change the world. There'd be a club for that, right? But what would hormone-crazed teens do with such power? You can see the answer firsthand through the kids in *Magic User's Club* (Japanese title: *Mahō Tsukai-tai!*, a multilayered pun that boils down to something like "The 'I Want to Use Magic!' Club," or more colloquially, "The 'We Wanna Be Witches' Club").

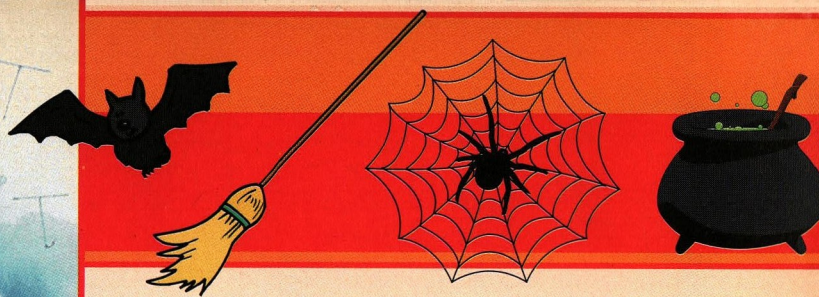
As practitioners of the arcane arts, most folks see members of this club as crazed losers with delusions of grandeur. But in this universe, magic is real (or at least more prevalent than in our world). This gives the main characters the chance to not only face their own social stigmas and adolescent doubts but also possibly save the Earth from an alien invasion...if they can show up to club meetings on time.

Magic User's Club began animated life as a six-part OAV (original animation video) series produced by Bandai Visual in 1996; these are the episodes now available from Media Blasters under its Anime Works label. *Mahō Tsukai-tai!* has also been animated as a 13-episode TV series (broadcast on the Japanese satellite station Wowow starting in 1999) that picks up where the video series left off. The series was created by Triangle Staff, but the key person in its genesis is Junichi Sato (*Gatekeepers*, series director, *Sailor Moon*), who drafted the original plan, produced, collaborated on the screenplay (with Akinori Endo of *3x3 Eyes*, *Battle Angel*, *Armitage III*, etc.), and did the storyboards. The animation's staff further contains such stars as Ikuku Ito (chief animator, *Sailor Moon S*) as character designer and animation director, and production designer Hiroshi Kato (*Neon Genesis Evangelion*). To top it all off, Studio GONZO's Mahiro Maeda (*Blue Submarine No. 6*) designed the Tsurinage's elaborate machines. As you might expect with this kind of lineup, the animation looks really, really good, with combining *Sailor Moon*'s cute characters (although leaning more toward sexy here) with a detailed sci-fi backdrop of alien science.

Most anime spawns or is spawned from a manga, but *Magic User's Club* has the distinction of having *two* manga series based on it. The first, by "Sham Neko," published by Kadokawa Comics, was released around the same time as the original OAVs and is geared toward a younger guy audience (what's called *shōnen* in Japan, or alternatively, "lads" in the U.K.). A more recent manga version, by Tammy Ohta, has pub-



All images for *Magic User's Club* © 1996 Triangle Staff • Bandai Visual



lished in *ASUKA FANTASY DX*, a gals' (*shôjo*) magazine. There is also a four-part novel series, by Chiaki Konaka (*Serial Experiments Lain*, *Bubblegum Crisis Tokyo 2040*, *Armitage III*). Whew!

The first OAV episode opens with an alien invasion. The aliens (called the Tsurinage), like many of their literary companions, possess far superior technology. Their initial fight with Earth's military forces is a technical slaughter. "Technical" because the aliens leave all the opposing forces alive, simply "erasing" their war machines from under them. However, after Earth's terrible defeat, instead of taking over the world, the alien machines fall in peacefully with the societies around the globe. Their gigantic cylindrical mothership travels from city to city, observing our daily life with its huge yet polite (they obey traffic laws!) spherical probes.

All this would be well and good if it weren't for the day-dreaming, glory-chasing attitude of Takeo Takakura. As leader of the overly eccentric Kitanohashi High School Magic User's Club (MUC), Takeo finds a purpose for his club and a way to (hopefully) get the adoration of its female members by declaring war on the alien forces. What begins as a simple cry for attention turns into an exploration of magic, love, and alien motivations.

Our heroine Sae Sawanoguchi is a naive, clumsy young lady, more than willing to go along with her *sempai* (upper-classman) Takeo and his plan—more because she has a crush on him than because she thinks that it's a good idea. As the story progresses, Sae also learns a great deal about magic and realizes the power within herself.

Following along behind Sae is Nanaka Nakatomi. A seemingly normal young lady whose only quirk is her friendship with the peculiar Sae, Nanaka is infatuated with the vice president of the club, Ayanojyo Aburatsubo. In fact, most of the members of the MUC seem to be obsessed with someone, creating entertaining love polygons.

In addition to the alien machines, the MUC has another rivalry in the *Heathers*-esque Manga Club, with which it shares a room. The head of the manga club, Mizuha Miyama, is an enormously egotistical and busty young woman who looks more like a boy's "hot for teacher" fantasy than a high school student. She goes to great lengths to shame Takeo and the MUC as a whole. The Manga Club is backed by a teacher who would rather push his philosophy of love than actually solve problems between club members, which means that the kids in the MUC are on their own.

The aliens in *Magic User's Club* are represented only by their machines and come in several varieties, each created for a specific purpose: observation, capture, close examination, and so on. The propeller-headed humanoids are reminiscent of the robots from *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* or the *Lupin III* episode, "Albatross, Wings of Death." Compete with suggestive tentacles, the alien machines complete the slightly *etchi* (*risqué*) feel of the series.

Although not based entirely on rude humor and sex, several elements of *Magic User's Club* remind us that these are teenagers, with all their drive and simplified ambition. Takeo, for instance, has a problem with his overactive daydreams about all the female magicians suddenly disrobing and throw-

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE)

The Magic User's Club



ing themselves at him. What can you expect from a guy whose facial features occasionally rearrange themselves to reveal his inner thoughts in writing? (You have to see it to understand.) Ayanojo, the club's vice president, is a particularly effeminate young man who is dead-set on seducing Takeo. And then there's Akane Aikawa, a new member of the club. Her magic abilities are quite strong, but she would rather go on a great number of dates in skimpy clothes. Sounds like high school, all right.

The shenanigans of the MUC eventually catch the attention of a local reporter, Minoru Minowa, and his photographer sidekick, Yoshito Yoshimoto. In their efforts to hunt down any secrets behind the otherwise passive Tsurinage, they end up helping and being helped by the MUC. Together they all find more or less what they are looking for, as well as a few things they weren't. And those are just the goings-on in the OAVs.

MAGIC AND SCHOOL CLUBS

Magic User's Club deals with two important things: magic and school clubs. We've covered the clubs above; moreover, regulars to Japanese entertainment will be familiar with this recurring theme. Like many other schools around the world, colleges and high schools in Japan have their fair share of clubs. Unlike in the States though, these often appear in the background of your favorite animation or comic, instead of a teen angst television. The Nekomi Motorcycle Club in *Oh My Goddess!* is a good example, for its closest U.S. counterparts, you could probably say that the "Scooby Gang" of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or the schoolgirls in *The Craft* are members of a sort of unofficial club.

Members of the MUC work magic by chanting, casting spells, and using wands or magic cards to focus their wills. Metaphysically speaking, the idea of using *foci*—objects upon which to focus your powers—to impress your will onto reality is the essence of magic in and of itself. The use of *foci* ties into the concept of ritual: having something familiar and magically appropriate to what the caster is trying to do makes casting a spell easier. This is probably why Sae finds it so easy to use her "Jeff-kun" stuffed teddy bear as a focus for her power. Since each person is different, it makes sense that they'd react differently to rituals; thus, **Magic User's Club's** suggestion that each person has a type of ritual circle that works best for him or her is a nice conceptualization of the individual nature of magic. (In a more traditional sense, they do fly on broomsticks.)

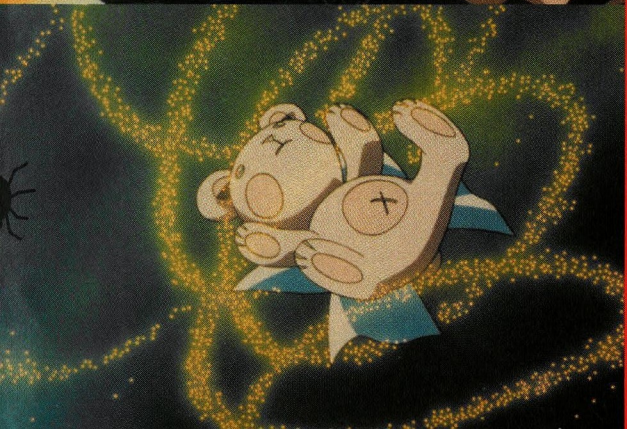
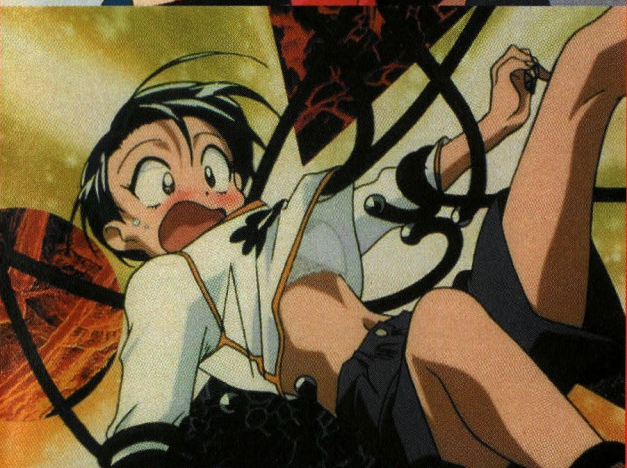
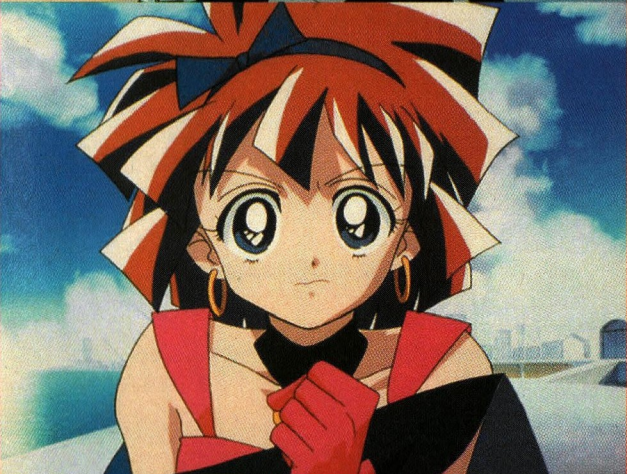
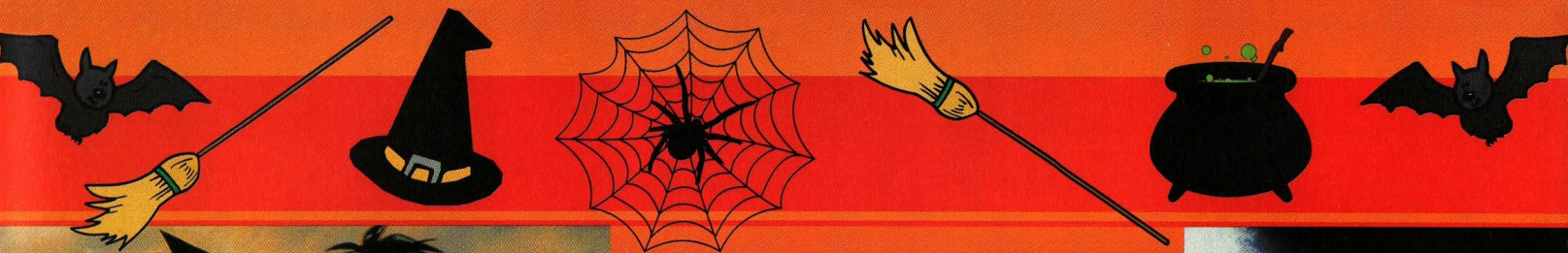
Incidentally, the original *Dungeons & Dragons* **Dungeon Master's Guide** had some pretty good examples of the classic magic circle: Two concentric circles with runes in between, the thaumaturgic triangle (Takeo's circle with a triangle in it) and that most maligned of symbols, the pentagram. There are lots of other circle-based or circle-related symbols across nearly all societies throughout history—the circle is a basic and powerful shape. Perhaps it's precisely because it is so simple that it is so very encompassing.

A lot of anime has a very positive message for youthful outcasts. It seems to say: "Be true to your heart, and the world is yours." Many anime heroes, even though they are usually outcasts (a result of the writer's self-image, no doubt), are young folks with decent morals, a good work ethic, and a good amount of bravery. These heroes, despite their outcast status, come out on top in the end, often complete with the love interest.

Magic User's Club is no different. Yeah, it's also a little lecherous at times, but then again, so is high school.

What the MUC kids do with their power is the basis of the story. Suffice it to say, they act like teenagers. They experiment, they doubt, they explore boundaries. In essence, they grow. That's what those years are all about. ★

Special thanks to LSkinner and her Sae's Magic Hat fan site (www.mysky.net/mtt) and to Gareth Storm for his insight into all things mysterious.



Wicca and Modern Magic

By Gareth Storm

*M*agic User's Club shows us a group of people who gather to practice magic. Likewise, if you watch *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *Charmed*, you've seen the practice of magic explored in both dramatic and humorous ways. But did you know there are real-life groups who practice magic, one of them being Wicca.

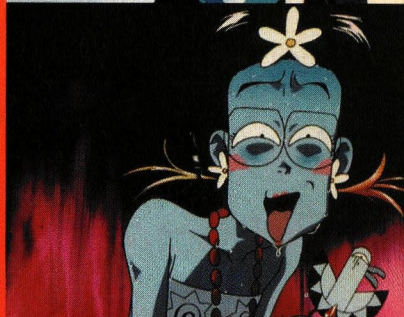
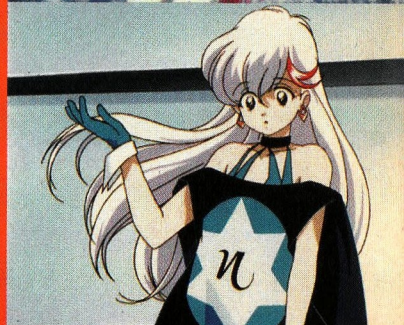
Wicca is a general term for a modern pantheistic religion based on ancient practices from several cultures, most notably Celtic, Greek, and Roman. Most Wiccans revere the Goddess and the God, each with various names or aspects depending on the particular branch of Wicca. Wiccan tenets tend to be based on personal responsibility and an understanding of the consequences of one's actions; the concept of karma is a strong guiding influence. Many Wiccans also include the practice of magic in their rituals, usually for the purpose of healing, asking for luck, or simply adding positive energy to the world for the benefit of all.

Western magical practice can be seen in two major arenas: religious magic (as outlined above) and ceremonial magic, such as practiced by the Ordo Templi Orientis, or OTO. Ceremonial magic is not usually directly associated with Wiccan religious practice, although many of the concepts and techniques overlap.

On a very basic level, magic is effecting change in accordance with the will. In order to do this, you may invoke higher powers, call on the names of angels or saints, use arcane gestures and/or phrases (ones documented as being associated with certain traits, abilities or concepts), or simply visualize the desired outcome. In a fantastical world such as in many anime, this can have quite dramatic results! In our world, however, such practice is usually a way to gain clarity or insight; to ask the help of bodhisattvas or other helpful spirits; or as mentioned above, to provide healing or positive energy for one's friends and loved ones or for the world. These things may actually be a part of a dramatic change, but they tend to be subtler than we generally see in anime.

If you want to find out more about Wicca or ceremonial magic, visit your local occult bookstore and have a look around. There are hundreds of books about both subjects, some better than others; flip through a few until you find one that works for you. For that, too, is one of the tenets of Wicca: What you do should feel right, for both you and for the world.

Gareth Storm is a Wiccan priest and has trained in various Western magic techniques.



(CONTINUED ON PAGE 34)



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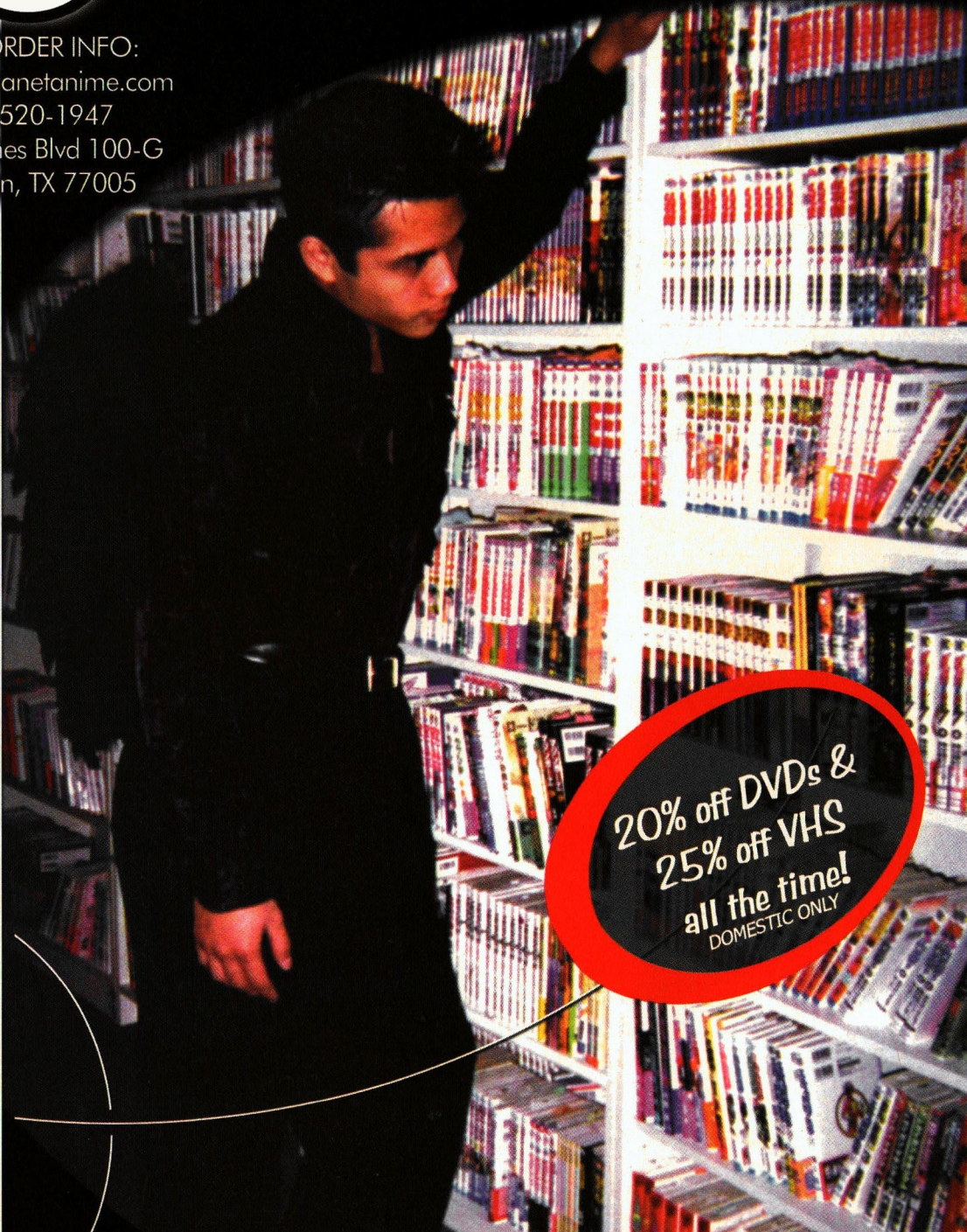
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JIN-ROH

A what-if story,
a fairy tale with
teeth, and a
meditation on man's
inhumanity to man.

By Patrick Macias

From *Alphaville* to *Zardoz*, the question at the heart of all great science-fiction stories is, "What if?" For instance, what if a scientist reanimated a dead corpse with the spark of life (*Frankenstein*), or what if a great cosmic intelligence directed the evolution of life on Earth (2001: *A Space Odyssey*). The question at the heart of the new anime film *Jin-Roh*, soon to be released to theaters nationwide by Viz Films/Tidepoint Pictures, is, "What if Germany, rather than America, had occupied Japan after World War II."

Naturally, with a culturally loaded question like that, the answers aren't going to be nice and easy ones. And as such *Jin-Roh* can be a dark, difficult experience for casual viewers. *Tenchi Muyo!* it is not. Instead, *Jin-Roh* is a major work of anime art as well as a psychological and political thriller that must be reckoned with.

Jin-Roh's nature becomes a clearer when you discover that one of the major players behind the scenes is Mamoru Oshii, who acted as producer and screenwriter on the film. Together with his protégé Hiroyuki Okiura (*Jin-Roh's* director), Oshii has created a movie that seems destined to be referred to in the same breath as other thought-provoking anime like *Akira*, *Perfect Blue*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Memories*. And in fact, both Oshii and Okiura had something of an influence in the making of the landmark films listed above.

Okiura, who was a mere 33 years old when *Jin-Roh* was completed (a neophyte by normal anime industry standards), began his career fast out of the starting gate working as a key animator on Katsuhiko Otomo's *Akira*. From there, he toiled on *Roujin-Z*, worked on both *Patlabor* features (directed by Oshii), *Memories*, and was credited as character designer and key animation supervisor on *Ghost in the Shell*.

Yet *Jin-Roh* is perhaps best understood first and foremost as a Mamoru Oshii film. His script for *Jin-Roh* is filled with the symbols and metaphors that also marked his earlier *Angel's Egg*, *Ghost in the Shell*; and to some extent, *Beautiful Dreamer*, the second *Urusei Yatsura* movie. Seen in *Jin-Roh* again are rainy days, a whiff of old Europe, mysterious museum settings, sad-eyed dogs, a world that is gray and cloaked in ambiguity and shadow...

Jin-Roh is set during the mid-'50s in an alternate world where the Nazi forces (rather than the U.S. forces) occupied Japan following World War II. The Japanese government that emerges from this situation is far from democratic. The populace feels powerless and their social unrest culminates in the creation of The Sect, an

armed urban guerrilla force that, among many tactics, use little girls nicknamed "Little Red Riding Hoods" to transport weapons.

To battle The Sect, the government forms the Capital Police Organization (CAPO), a heavily armored special corps whose grim jurisdiction lies just outside of official control. These soldiers are men transformed into cold-blooded animals through a blend of specialized technology and military necessity. Set a mere ten years after the end of the World War II, the CAPO's lethal technology is wildly out of place in the generally low-tech Japan of the '50s, where skyscrapers are not yet the norm. Rather than being realistic, they come from a nightmare of armed force embellished by a military fetishist's dream of excessive force.

The chaotic, frightening battles between The Sect and the police look and feel like the actual conflicts between student protesters and the police that occurred in Japan in the late '60s, a movement whose radical left-wing ideals of freedom and democracy are still revered by members of the baby-boom generation.

Jin-Roh's story begins in the middle of such a struggle, complete with riot gear and tear gas. The camera follows a young girl, a bomb-carrying "Little Red Riding Hood" who descends into the sewers to meet with other members of The Sect. There, a menacing CAPO soldier approaches her. The faceless soldier simply asks, "Why?" before her bomb dramatically detonates.

The soldier is a young man named Kazuki Fuse. Troubled by memories of the girl he saw die in front of his eyes, Fuse visits her grave. There he meets her sister, apparently something of a "Little Red Riding Hood" herself. Fuse soon enters an uncertain relationship with her. Little do both know that their every move is being watched from all sides: by fellow brigade troops, the police, the government. A complex conspiracy is underway, with Fuse, the Wolf, and his Little Red Riding Hood at the center.

Even the most attentive of viewers might find *Jin-Roh's* complex story a bit difficult to follow the first time out. Rich in politics but slim in obvious emotional responses, as has been the norm with Oshii's films (his recent live-action feature film *Avalon* as well), the motivations of his characters are only slightly more comprehensible than his trademark symbolism.

It is a beautiful but gloomy film. Like *Ghost in the Shell*, it offers a kaleidoscope of city images. But whereas *Ghost's* Hong Kong is a futuristic hotbed of media-rich Asian chaos, *Jin-Roh's* alternate Tokyo is haunted by the past: by the ghosts of war, by Germany's Teutonic culture superimposed in a subtle but significant fashion, over Japan's.

Underneath all the military gear and political scheming lies the classical fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood. Just as the biblical

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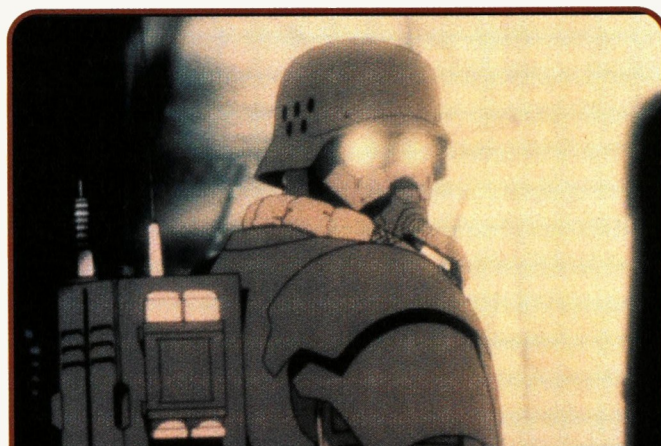
JIN-ROH



account of Noah's Ark provided the subtext for *Angel's Egg*, *Jin-Roh*—with its squads of wolves-in-disguise and lost little girls—symbolically reenacts the fairy tale. It also calls into question, in highly provocative fashion, who is the predator and who is the prey.

Every effort has been made to bring *Jin-Roh* to American theaters with the utmost care. While the film will be screened in a new English-dubbed version, the voice-actors have all been hand-picked by director Okiura himself. Okiura has also given his approval to every line in the translated script, ensuring its authenticity with the original Japanese version. Working from this script, voice-actors like Michael Dobson (alumnus of *Gundam Wing* and *Please Save My Earth*, now in the role of Fuse) are being instructed to dub the film as if it truly were a live-action film and not just the next 'toon on the work sheet.

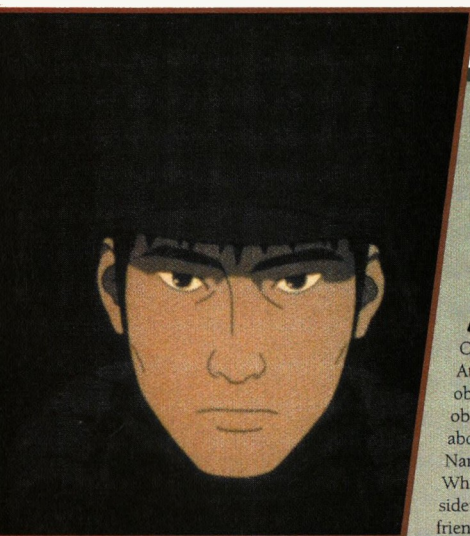
What if an anime film was done right in America? Check out *Jin-Roh*, and you'll see for yourself. ★



PACK OF WOLVES

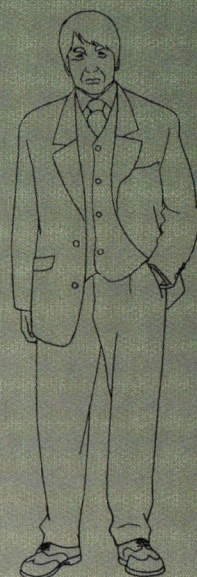
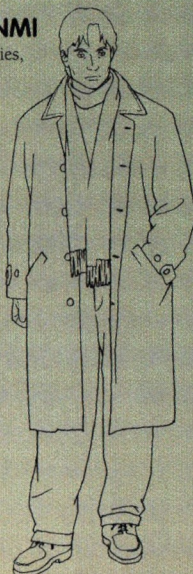
The striking heavy armor, helmets, and glowing red eyes that mark *Jin-Roh's* Capital Police Organization are familiar figures that pop up regularly in the works of Mamoru Oshii. However, *Jin-Roh* marks the first time that we've seen these fearsome soldiers in an animated form. After making their first appearance in Oshii's 1987's live-action film *Akai Megane* ("Red Spectacles") and its 1991 prequel, *Stray Dog: Kerberos Panzer Cops*, the director next turned to manga to depict his deadly pets.

While Oshii wrote scripts, artist Kamui Fujiwara drew the pictures for 1988's *Legend of Wolf-Dog*, published in English by Dark Horse Comics in 1994 as *Hellhounds: Panzer Cops*. Oshii has since reunited with Fujiwara for a new round of Wolf-Dog stories, which depict a time period of political turmoil set right after the *Jin-Roh* movie.

CHARACTER
SPOTLIGHT

ATSUSHI HENMI

One of Fuse's few allies, Atsushi helps the obsessed soldier obtain information about the deceased Nanami Agawa. While Henmi considers Fuse a good friend from their old school days together, Henmi might in fact be working from an agenda all his own....



BUNMEI MUROTO

Muroto is a bureaucrat in charge of the Capital Police's Public Security Division. He is extremely troubled by rumors that a secret group may exist within the Special Unit.



KEI AMEMIYA

After meeting Fuse at the grave of her younger sister, Nanami, 17-year-old Kei begins a dangerous relationship with the troubled Capital Police soldier.



MAMORU OSHII

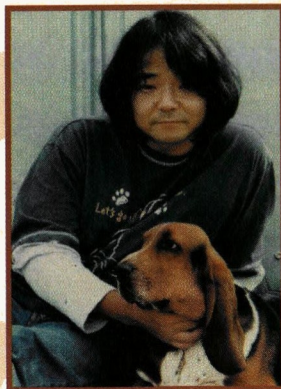
The writer of *Jin-Roh* and director of *Ghost in the Shell* on alternate histories, machine bodies, and the nature of terrorism. Interview by *Toshifumi Yoshida*. Translation by *Andy Nakatani*.

"I've always wanted to use the Little Red Riding Hood story because I like it. It's a story of man and animals. More specifically it's about wolves. They're not dogs, but they are in the same family. And that's why I wanted to use this fairy tale."

Thus Mamoru Oshii describes his reason for one of *Jin-Roh*'s key plot elements—the classic fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood, and how its gruesome tragedy mirrors the lives of the film's protagonists. (In this film, the fairy tale is seen in an obscure German version with a much harsher plotline than the one with which American children have long since become accustomed.)

"Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf meet and together follow through to a sad fate. I changed it to a story of a man and a woman. Now, [director] Okiura took it as a pure story of a man and woman, but I cannot write and am not interested in that type of sad love story between a man and a woman. I don't really care about that kind of thing," he laughs. "For me it was a story of an animal and a person meeting each other. A sad love story between a person and a wolf. That was my intention"

ANIMERICA: What kind of work did you do before you became a director? Did you work in the anime industry? Did you immediately become a director?



MAMORU OSHII MINI-BIO

Born: 8 August 1951,
in Tokyo, Japan.

Marital Status: Married

Blood Type: O

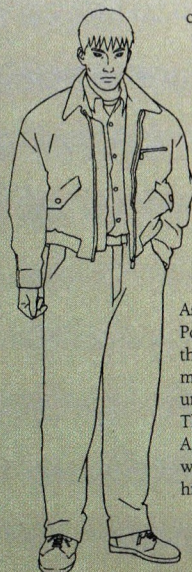


THE SECT

A left-wing terrorist organization, dedicating to overthrowing the postwar Japanese government. Skilled in street fighting and other modes of low-tech urban combat, its members resort to suicide bombings (and enlisting young girls among their ranks) to further the cause.

NANAMI AGAWA

As a Little Red Riding Hood working for The Sect, young Nanami lives a dangerous and short life as a weapons smuggler. Her death before Fuse's eyes causes him to question his, and his nation's, worth and humanity.



THE CAPITAL POLICE ORGANIZATION SPECIAL UNIT

This elite fighting force was created by the post-German occupation government to combat the almost-daily terrorist attacks of The Sect. Rumors say that a secret faction exists within the Capital Police. They are known as the Jin-Roh, the "Wolf Brigade."

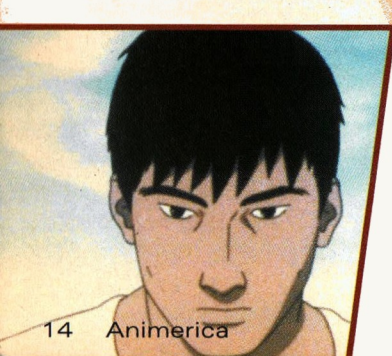
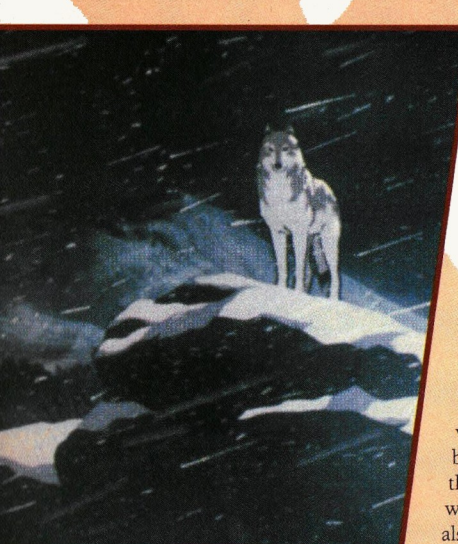
KAZUKI FUSE

As a trooper in the Capital Police's Special Unit, Fuse is the very model of military might and efficiency. That is, until a chance encounter with The Sect terrorist Nanami Agawa makes him doubt his worth as a soldier and turns his life upside down.



ANIMERICA INTERVIEW

JIN-ROH



Oshii: Immediately after school, I worked with a radio production company. I was a director for radio shows. I did that for about a year.

ANIMERICA: Did you go to a vocational school for that?

Oshii: No.

ANIMERICA: Then you went to a regular university?

Oshii: Yes.

ANIMERICA: What did you study?

Oshii: I was in the Education department.

ANIMERICA: Did you want to become a teacher?

Oshii: Not particularly. It was just cheaper that way. [LAUGHS] I went to a public university and the school I happened to go to only had an Education department. Within that, I was in the Art Education department. It was for becoming an art instructor at elementary schools.

ANIMERICA: At that time, did you foresee yourself becoming a director?

Oshii: Yes, I did. I felt that I would become a director from the moment I started university. Well, maybe not the moment I started, I guess I thought I would become a director some time when I was in my first year of university.

ANIMERICA: What would you have liked to become if you hadn't become a director?

Oshii: A schoolteacher. [LAUGHS] Well, maybe not. Actually, I felt that a schoolteacher would be the one thing I would *not* do. I spent a fair amount of time with elementary school kids in practical training as a student teacher. It was not a painful experience—it was fun. Well, rather than *fun*, perhaps I should say that the children liked me. However, I felt that I couldn't get along well with the other teachers, so I don't think I actually would have made it as a teacher.

ANIMERICA: So you became a director. How did you come to work in anime?

Oshii: I was doing work as a radio director, but I quit that job after about a year. Then I started working for a different company. It was a regular company where I was a salaryman. I did that for about a year, but I also got bored with that and quit. I then thought I would become a schoolteacher, because I was licensed for it. While teaching, I thought I could also work on screenplays. However, to be a teacher in Japan, there is a system where you have to take a national test that is given annually. You have to pass that test in order to get a job as a teacher, even if you have a license.

ANIMERICA: You have to take the test every year?

Oshii: The test is given every year. Even if you have a license, you still have to pass the test; otherwise, you can't hold a job as a teacher. You can get a job as an emergency teacher on the remote islands, but you

can't get a job at a regular school unless you pass the test. I had planned on sending off my application to take that test—actually, I asked a friend of mine to send the application for me, but he forgot to do it. So I couldn't become a teacher.

I had already quit my job and I didn't know what to do. Things didn't go as I had planned, and I was unemployed. I spent my time doing things such as building plastic models at home. But I couldn't keep playing around forever. When I finally felt I just had to get a job, I happened to see a poster at the train station for job openings at a certain company. The company was Tatsunoko Productions—an animation company. That's how I got into the animation industry.

ANIMERICA: What was the first anime you directed?

Oshii: There were many anime in which I worked on the production. I did work on the storyboards. Tatsunoko Productions has a system where you have to be able to draw up storyboards, so they started me off doing that. The first storyboards I worked on were for *Yattaman* (from the *Time Bokan* series). The first anime where I was responsible for the whole project was *Ippatsu Kanta-kun*—an anime about youth baseball.

ANIMERICA: What year was that?

Oshii: Let's see...I started working at the studios when I was 26. So I believe that was 1977.

ANIMERICA: You are well known in America for your work on *Urusei Yatsura*. When did you start working on that?

Oshii: I was 30 years old. I remember it well, because I



THE MUSIC OF JIN-ROH

Another striking element of *Jin-Roh* is its music. *Jin-Roh*'s composer is Hajime Mizoguchi, whose previous credits include several live-action Japanese TV dramas, the anime series *Please Save My Earth* and celebrated collaborations with Yoko Kanno on *Macross Plus* and *The Vision of Escaflowne*. Drawing his influences from classical music to British pop, Mizoguchi's score for *Jin-Roh* fully utilizes a full orchestra for the melancholy sounds only stringed instruments can produce, the power of modern electronica (electric guitars have a strong presence), and the unearthly quality of human voices. Mizoguchi's signature cello, deep and mournful, is also a recurring musical theme.



worked on the first storyboards for *Urusei Yatsura* on my thirtieth birthday. I quit Tatsunoko after about three years. Then I forced my way into Studio Pierrot. I asked them to hire me. There was a producer I greatly respected, Toriumi [Hisayuki Toriumi], the director of *Gatchaman*. He became my master/teacher. I went to Studio Pierrot because I wanted to study production under him. That was when I was 28. For a while, I worked on a children's anime called *Nirusu no Fushigi no Tabi* ("The Wonderful Adventure of Nils") based on a famous Swedish fairy tale. I worked on that anime and studied under Toriumi for two years. After that series ended, Pierrot's president came to me and suddenly told me to direct. My teacher felt I was too young and was against the idea, but because of company conditions, there weren't enough people, so that's how I came to be the director for *Urusei*.

ANIMERICA: I had planned to start off the interview with *Jin-Roh*, but... well, let's move on to *Jin-Roh*—

Oshii: That's going to take a long time. [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: Really? [LAUGHS] Perhaps we can return to your older works after we talk about *Jin-Roh*. The ideas for *Jin-Roh*—the illustrations, and the original story, you had from before. Where did the idea for it come from?

Oshii: Originally, I planned to do it [direct it] myself, so it was going to be a different story. But then it was decided that Okiura would be the director. There was a lot of discussion, but in the end it was decided that he would direct. Okiura requested that I write a story about a man and woman.

ANIMERICA: Within the *Jin-Roh* setting?

Oshii: Yes.

ANIMERICA: You have done other works within the *Jin-Roh* setting, such as *Akai Megane* ("Red Spectacles"). Exactly how many works are there?

Oshii: Two live-action movies and the manga. The original manga I wrote, *Kenroh Densetsu*, changed magazines about three times. The first part is available in the United States through—what was it called?—Dark Horse...through Dark Horse. It is called *Panzer Cops (Hellhounds: Panzer Cops)*. It was canceled in the first magazine it was serialized in. The company of the second magazine went bankrupt, and the story was finally completed in the third magazine it was published in. Part 2 was published through Kadokawa. It went through three or four companies.

ANIMERICA: That was rough going.

Oshii: That manga has bad luck. Someone has it in for that manga.

ANIMERICA: And the film was delayed for a year.

Oshii: Originally, the title was not going to be *Jin-Roh*. It was going to be called *Kenroh Densetsu*, and it was to be released as a series. But Bandai wanted it to be a movie. The conditions were that Okiura would direct and that I would write the screenplay.

ANIMERICA: Okiura did work on *Ghost in the Shell*...

Oshii: Character design and animation direction.

ANIMERICA: Was the German military look your idea?

Oshii: Yes. When I thought about the design, the German military style was the first thing that came to mind. I thought I would use that as the basis for the design. Bucchan—that is, Yutaka Izubuchi, who happened to be the designer—was a big fan of the German military at the time.

ANIMERICA: He still is now, isn't he?

Oshii: Yes he is. [LAUGHS] Both of our thoughts matched on the matter, so we went with the German military style.

(CONTINUED ON PAGE 36)

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PANDA! GO PANDA!

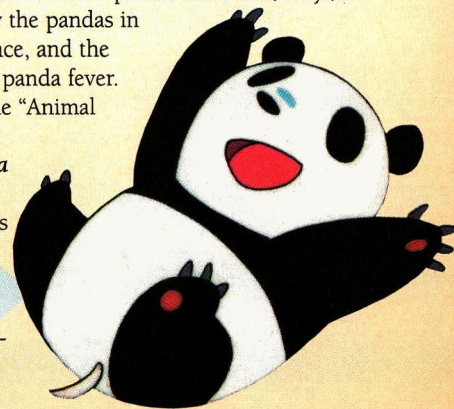
A look at the Hayao Miyazaki/Isao Takahata collaboration *Panda! Go, Panda!*, plus two other early Miyazaki titles that influenced his later movie classics. By **Andrew Osmond**

In 1972, the Japanese prime minister visited Beijing. During the visit, the Chinese government presented him with a gift of two pandas, called Ran Ran and Kan Kan. The pandas were flown to Tokyo and exhibited at Ueno Zoo. The public reaction could only be described as panda-monium (sorry!). Nine million people saw the pandas in their first year of residence, and the country was gripped by panda fever. (For more details, see the “Animal Friends” entry in Mark Schilling’s *Encyclopaedia of Pop Culture*.)

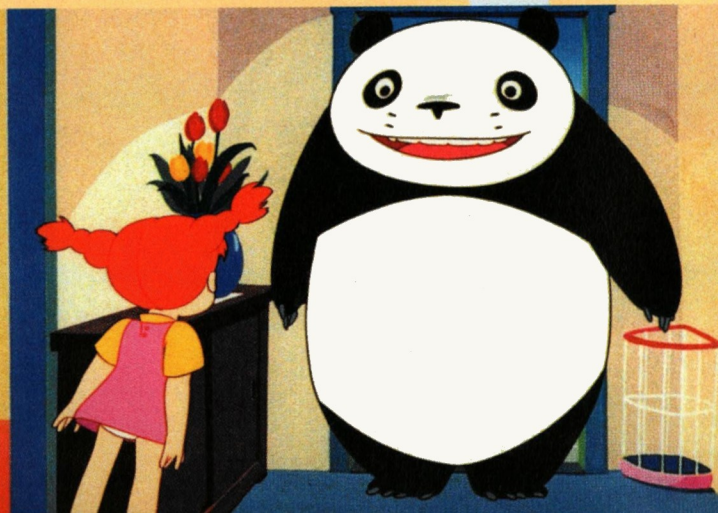
When the *Panda* films were made, Hayao Miyazaki and Isao Takahata were working at a new studio called A-Pro. The pair wanted to make a TV series based on the *Pippi Longstocking* books, by Astrid Lindgren, but were refused. *Panda* was made with the team assembled to make the Pippi series. Indeed, the pigtailed Mimiko bears a suspicious resemblance to image-board sketches of Pippi. (Like Mimiko, Lindgren’s Pippi, who has only a horse and a monkey as family, is self-reliant.)

The Japanese film titles were *Panda Kopanda* (“Panda, Panda Cub,” 1972) and *Panda Kopanda: Amefuri Circus no Maki* (“Panda, Panda Cub: Rainy-Day Circus,” 1973). Both were theatrically released as part of the Toho Champion Festival children’s programs, which also included monster flicks such as *Godzilla vs. Megalon*. The *Panda* films were made by A-Pro and produced by Tokyo Movie Shinsha.

One key animator who came to Miyazaki’s attention on these films was 22-year-old Yoshifumi Kondo. Kondo contributed to *Future Boy Conan* and designed *Sherlock Hound*’s cast (see later) before becoming a leading Ghibli animator; he directed *Whisper of the Heart* in 1995. The Japanese voice-cast included Yasuo Yamada, the first and best Lupin in many TV and film adventures including Miyazaki’s *Castle of Cagliostro*. Yamada



PANDA! GO PANDA!



voices a policeman in the first *Panda* film, a ringmaster's assistant in the second.

According to Miyazaki, "We talked about what we would do if we got to make a third or fourth episode, should we do this or that, but we only got to the second one ("Rainy Day Circus"). We couldn't make more than that, so when I made *Totoro*, well, it wasn't like I wanted to recreate *Panda*, but I wanted to make a movie (for children) properly."

The first thing to get straight about the *Panda! Go, Panda!* films is that they're very much for children—not in the way that *My Neighbor Totoro* or *Kiki's Delivery Service* are for children (although the *Panda* films have links to both) but rather in the way *Sesame Street* or *Teletubbies* are for children. That said, they're good children's films and, like the best in the category, stand up over time. (Both films are nearly 30 years old, made in 1972 and 1973, respectively.)

Their main interest for older viewers is that *Panda! Go, Panda!* represents an early teaming of future Ghibli founders Takahata (*Grave of the Fireflies*) and Miyazaki (*Princess Mononoke*). Miyazaki wrote and Takahata directed the tales of the perky little girl, Mimiko, left alone by her grandma. Mimiko finds herself in an interspecies family consisting of huge papa Panda, ultracutie baby Panda and—in the second film, "Rainy Day Circus"—an equally cute baby tiger. (Miyazaki also did the design, layouts and key animation.) While not as inventive or crafted as the duo's later work, the *Panda* films are the source of much of what followed. Watching *Panda* alongside Miyazaki's film *Totoro*, for example, it's easy to see how the later film built on the material, broadening its appeal to a wider age group.

The *Totoro* parallels are obvious from

the opening credits, with a chorus-line of dancing pandas over the same bright orange background as *Totoro*'s dustbunnies and creepy-crawlies. The song may not be as good as *Totoro*'s "Sanpo" number, but it's clearly from the same stable; easily hummable, insanely memorable. Pioneer's English dub of the films keeps the original song, presumably explaining why the video is called *Panda! Go, Panda!* (In fact, the Japanese singers are saying "Panda kopanda," meaning "Panda Panda Cub"; this is also the Japanese title.) The original Japanese credits, available on the DVD, feature cute illustrations of pandas riding bicycles, blowing bubbles, and so forth. These look very like the closing titles/pictures from *Totoro*.

Visually, the films themselves take a simple approach. There's little of the realistic background detail associated with Miyazaki. Rather, the emphasis is on bright, flat colors and simple, appealing shapes. The look is reminiscent of a child's picture book and works on that level. The character animation is generally adequate but occasionally strained; Mimiko's skipping through the forest is especially awkward. Miyazaki himself said, "I thought we had used many more cels than TV animation, but realized we were still stringent. Watching it now, I feel we should have moved it more, and it's a bit painful [to watch]." Despite this shortcoming, the films look good today.

The stories, matching the pictures, are simply told with many lists and repetitions, making them ideal for kids to rewatch on video. The second film even reworks the "Who's been sleeping in my bed?" routine from the Goldilocks fairy tale, with Mimiko and the pandas as the three bears. There's a fast turnover of things happening to keep youngsters'



attention, even if it's just Mimiko making breakfast or putting her cub to bed. Of the two films, "Rainy Day Circus" has a more sustained story and action, and more gags. It's also closer to Miyazaki's adventure films, with a new environment—a flooded town that the characters treat as a playground—and a rousing finale on a circus train.

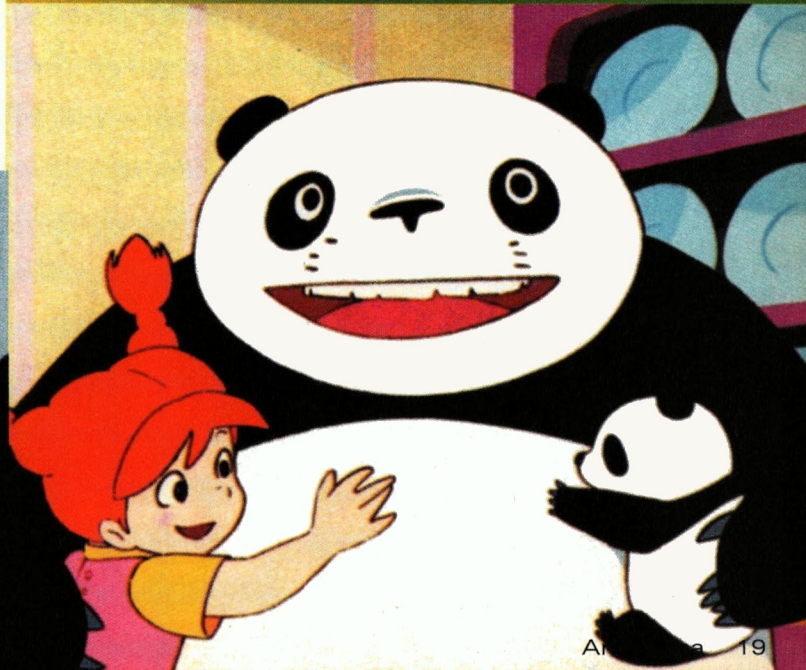
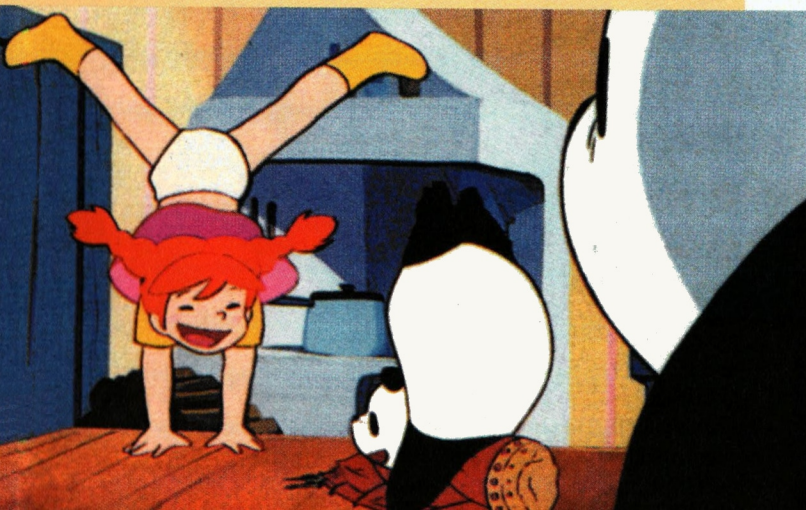
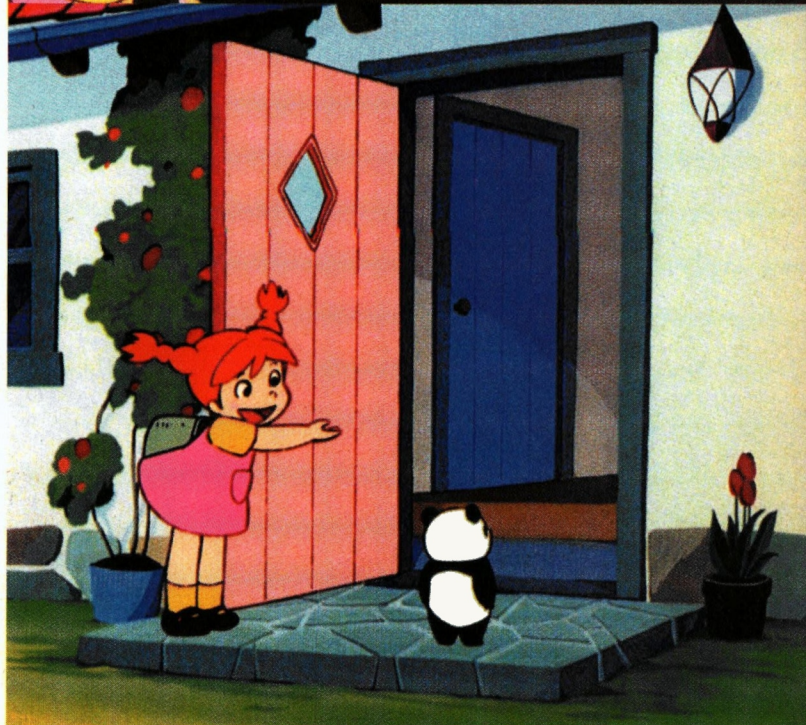
Storywise, the obvious similarities are with *Totoro*. Both deal with cuddly and lovable creatures befriending a little girl or girls (Mimiko in *Panda*, sisters Mei and Satsuki in *Totoro*). Papa Panda, with his huge round body and wide grin, is a close relative of "Big Totoro," while his cub recalls the timid mini-Totoros. *Panda's* heroine, Mimiko, is between Mei and Satsuki in age and personality. Like the *Totoro* girls, she accepts her odd friends without fear or question. There are more-specific parallels. Mimiko writes to her grandma about her adventures, as Satsuki does to her mother; the cub follows Mimiko to school, as Mei does Satsuki. The smaller characters regularly jump onto papa Panda's chest, as Mei and Satsuki do to go flying with Totoro.

There are links with other works too. When the panda cub follows Mimiko to school, he impersonates a stuffed toy, as Kiki's cat Jiji does in *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Later in "Rainy Day Circus," the cub seems threatened by a huge tiger, which picks him up in its mouth...and returns him to his mistress. The same thing happens with Jiji and a dog in *Kiki's Delivery Service*. Mimiko herself is a confident girl, cheery and helpful, and a clear role model for the child audience. Mimiko's most obvious relative is Heidi, the outgoing "girl of the Alps." The anime version of Johanna Spyri's classic was made for TV in 1974, with Takahata directing and Miyazaki doing layout and scene design. Like the first *Panda* film, *Heidi* shies away from action, telling its story through the accumulation of everyday details. The same approach is used in *Totoro*.

In the end, the difference between *Panda* and a film like *Totoro* has less to do with story than with presentation. Beyond the simplified, colorful look, the *Panda* films have bouncy, everpresent music—no trademark Miyazaki silences!—and a script that, understandably, tells more than it shows. Also, the film is not really concerned with "human" interactions, so strong in films like Miyazaki's *Totoro* or the childhood scenes in Takahata's *Only Yesterday*. Mimiko is a fantasy girl whose "family" are other fantasy characters, living happily together in a picture-book world. While Miyazaki is called a fantasy director on the basis of his later work, dealing with far-flung times and places, his achievement was making these subsequent films more "real."

Panda! Go, Panda! is available from Pioneer on English-dubbed VHS video and bilingual DVD.

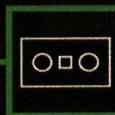
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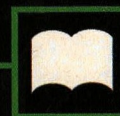


FINAL FANTASY IX

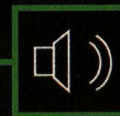
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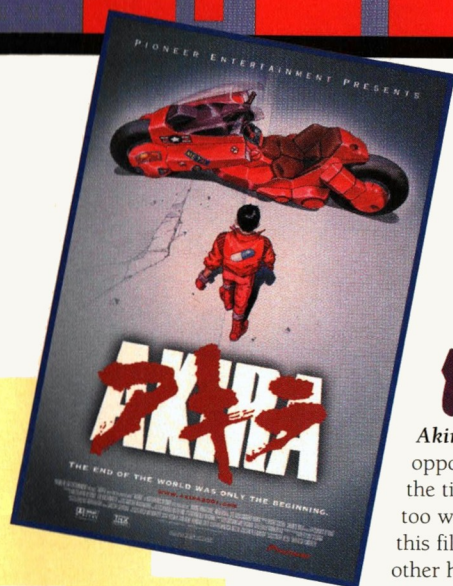
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AKIRA

Is there another anime movie that has had such a great influence on the artforms of not only anime, but live film, of comics, of fiction, than *Akira*? Possibly not. And if you've never had the opportunity to see it before, the time is coming when you too will be able to fall under this film's spell. If, on the other hand, you witnessed *Akira* the first time

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around, you'll soon be able to see it in a whole new light.

Created by Katsuhiro Otomo in 1982, *Akira* was originally a manga story serialized in the Japanese anthology *YOUNG MAGAZINE*. Otomo's story soon became one of the first manga titles to be translated and released to the U.S. market, in this case by Marvel Comics under its Epic imprint, in the mid-1980s. Since then, *Akira* has been translated into over 13 different languages including French, Italian, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Chinese, Finnish, Swedish, Polish and Indonesian.

THE FILM AND THE RESTORATION

The story went into production as an animated film in 1987, before the manga series had even finished. With direction by creator Katsuhiro Otomo himself, the completed movie version of *Akira* contained over 150,000 hand-painted cels, over 2,000 scene cuts, 327 colors (50 of which were custom-blended for the film), and the cooperation of over 320 companies working on the actual animation. The voices were prerecorded, and the animation drawn to fit the mouth movements—a practice common for high-end animated projects such as Disney films, but rare in Japanese animation. The music, by Shoji Yamashiro, performed by his Geinoh Yamashirogumi group, utilized over 200 musicians. Both the film's scale and budget were unprecedented for the time, and even today, few anime films have rivaled it.

Released theatrically in Japan in July 1988, *Akira* had made its way to U.S. theaters by December 1989. During its North American run, *Akira* ranked in the top 60 for 20 weeks on *VARIETY*'s weekly theatrical box office sales report. The video release did even better—in 1991, the film was released on VHS through Streamline Pictures and on Criterion Laserdisc. Rereleases over the years were always hot items—new letterboxed and subtitled editions released in the late '90s through Orion Home Video were snapped up quickly and just as quickly became collector's items as the North American rights to the film changed hands.

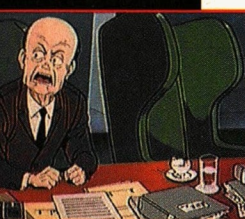
Now, 13 years after the original theatrical release in Japan, Pioneer Entertainment is getting ready to unleash *Akira* on a whole new audience, and has pulled out all the stops to give the landmark film a high-tech facelift for its 21st century premiere.

Starting from the original negative in Japan, a new inter-negative was produced and color-corrected to create a new, high-definition master. Dirt and scratch-



All images for Akira © MASH • ROOM Co., Ltd. Tokyo

AKIRA



es that the original master had picked up over the years were removed digitally. This process, plus the color correction, restored the film to a quality level that hasn't been seen since the film's initial release in Japan. The colors are brighter, the animation is crisper—viewed in its new form, in digital projection, the remastered *Akira* seems a whole new film.

Picture wasn't the only element to be revamped. A new English translation from the original Japanese script was created, the entire film was redubbed with new voice-actors, remixed in Dolby Digital AC3 Surround Sound, and submitted for approval by THX. Finally, at the end of all this painstaking work, *Akira* was ready for state-of-the-art, digital projection theaters, with top-of-the-line picture and sound.

NEO TOKYO-2019

It is thirty-one years after World War III. The great metropolis of Neo-Tokyo has risen from the ashes of a destroyed Tokyo, but as time passes, and people's memories of the horrors of the past fade, Neo-Tokyo has become a dark and dangerous place. Government corruption is common, gangs and terrorists have the run of the city streets, and a powerful military hides the secrets of the past and still continues to conduct the kind of experiments that first led to Tokyo's destruction.

It is against this backdrop that *Akira*'s story unfolds. Its central characters are teenage punks; destructive members of a motorcycle gang who get their kicks out of rumbling with rival gangs in violent, high-speed chases across the city. But when the gang's youngest member, Tetsuo, accidentally runs into an escaped experimental test subject, he is captured by the military and subjected to experiments that awaken powerful psychic powers within him. Now the city has to contend with Tetsuo's teenage rage and as violence erupts, perhaps only a force from the past can help contain Tetsuo...only that power is the same one that destroyed Tokyo 30 years ago—*Akira*.

IMPRESSIONS FROM THE PREMIERE

Dystopia (noun) 1: An imaginary place where people lead dehumanized and often fearful lives.

After seeing *Akira* again after many years I was struck by its gritty, complex vision of a future that seems only a step away from our own. Despite technological advances and urban growth, the world *Akira* presents leaves room for social unrest, poverty, and wasted human potential.

The overriding theme of technology advancing beyond humanity's ability to control it responsibly is one that is still as relevant today as it was when *Akira* was originally released. It still seems ahead of its time.

With all the school shootings in recent years, I couldn't help but draw parallels between their protagonists and the tragic figure that is Tetsuo. Pushed aside, shoved around, and left to rot by a materialistic society, his sudden access to power gives him an outlet for his rage that he is unwilling and ultimately unable to control.

Akira's epic scope, combined with its complex, morally ambiguous characters and stunning visuals make it remarkable.

—Nathan Parker

I first saw *Akira* two years ago when I got it from the video section at a public library. The movie left me with a big "Huh?" back then, but I still thought Kaneda's bike was the greatest thing on two wheels. And, after seeing it this time, it made some actual sense to me. Years later, after some time and remastering, the red

motorcycle is still one of the tightest things on two wheels, and it looks even better. It's not just the bike either; everything looks better and brighter, from the crazy religious nut to Tetsuo's giant expanding mass of flesh. I don't even remember what the old Streamline dub dished out for an explanation about *Akira*, but I know I honestly did not get it. Here, today, now—thanks to the new "energy" explanation—I can smack my head against the back of a chair and say, "Oh! So *that's* what *Akira* is supposed to be!"

—Winnie Chow

There's a lot to appreciate in *Akira* and a lot to be said about politics and ideas of spirituality in it. But *Akira* speaks to me best in its portrayal of young people. It's not often that we see film, animated or not, that takes teenagers seriously and portrays them three-dimensionally. I first saw the film when I was about 12 but didn't begin to appreciate what it said until I was 15. Seeing the rerelease of *Akira* was another revelation; the rewritten English script makes so much more sense and goes a long way in explaining a lot of things. Just as extraordinarily improved is the restoration of the film's picture and sound. Damn if it wasn't the most beautiful thing I've seen on a movie screen this year. The silly Streamline dub (anyone else notice Kaneda had the same voice as Leonardo the ninja turtle?) has been replaced with something more reasonable, albeit less quotable.

I encourage everyone, especially teens, to see this great lesson in anime history. I was surprised that it was so undated when compared with today's anime. *Akira*'s visuals are only topped by its thought-provoking ideas and its empowering portrayal of young people. It's that damn good.

—Rio Yañez

I was a bit nervous about seeing the new dub of *Akira*. I remember all too well when I first saw the Streamline dub on the big screen in Los Angeles.

A couple of years earlier (1989) I had acquired a "copy" of the Japanese version from some shady guy I met in a comics shop. (This is was the only way I knew how to get anime—if you wanted anime, you had to pay that shady guy US\$30 to \$40 for your bootleg tape.) I put the tape in and cranked it up. It blew my mind. It was so sleek and stylized. Why couldn't this be shown in America? I couldn't understand. Surely the generation that grew up on *Star Wars* could appreciate this. Then, eventually, I got to see film on the big screen. I couldn't believe what I heard. It sounded ridiculous. This, surely, was not the intent of the original filmmakers. I was embarrassed to have brought my friends. People were laughing at the quality of the dub.

This new version was a big improvement. I was able take the film seriously, for the most part. The jokes worked and the voices matched the characters fairly well. The character names were pronounced with respect for the Japanese language. The voices of the children, particularly Kyoko, were problematic, but that is something you expect.

—Ian Robertson

I went to the cinema expecting to be disappointed by *Akira* like I was the first time I saw the film, which had me wondering why it was ever theatrically released Stateside. When I first watched *Akira* on video a few years ago, I found it too hurried and humorless in comparison to the manga (well, the first 15 or so issues I managed to borrow).

With the remastered print, I found the story to be intentionally funny (I mean, other than just dubbing troubles) and now I think the manga (also on its second try) runs a bit too long. The new

dubbing allowed me to “enjoy the silence” that makes *Akira* so powerful, and what I figured would be dated artwork turned out to be still quite fresh, especially as I kept reminding myself that a lot of recent animation uses ideas from *this* film, not the other way around.

Maybe it's the remastered print, or maybe because I'm a bit older, but there seems to be a message in the film that I didn't pick up the first time, and thankfully it isn't preachy. The protesters, the military, the luxury in the background, even the bureaucracy of Neo-Tokyo spoke to me as much as the story between Kaneda and Tetsuro, which I found more interesting here than previously.

Akira is still the title that people name first when I mention anime, mostly thanks to its first release in U.S. theaters. I usually shrug off *Akira* as politely as I can and recommend another title to get people more interested in anime, but now I might actually have to say, “That's right, and it's one you need to see.” That's going to take some practice, but the remastered print should make it easier.

—Jaime Starling

I have a shameful confession to make: this past weekend was the first time I'd seen *Akira*. Somehow, a million college anime fests and late-night Sci-Fi Channel marathons passed me by during my formative years. I entered the theater expecting to be underwhelmed, if only because it had been built up in my mind as *the* badass anime. What the hell—I was still blown away. Sharp, cinematic animation, a soundtrack that gets away with everything, an outrageous plot that somehow remains gripping enough to justify its own silliness, and imaginative visual sequences ranging from the pulse-throbbing bike rides to the eerie nursery toys bleeding milk...this is a trip and a half. In this release, the print is clean and bright—I had no idea I was watching a digital projection—and the dubbing ranks with the best. My one big disappointment: the movie isn't nearly as surreal or incomprehensible as everyone told me it would be...but maybe it only seemed sane because I'd just finished watching the *Revolutionary Girl Utena* movie a few days before.

—Shaenon Garrity

Who woulda thought it? Revisiting *Akira* a decade later, I find it to be a completely different movie. It's not so much the new script—although surely it must have helped communicate some of the movie's more obscure themes—and it's not like any of the signature scenes had faded from my memory over the intervening years. Rather, it seems I've grown up enough that what I once perceived as a cool but nonsensical jumble of street riots and psychic battles now presents itself to me as a coherent whole.

One aspect that originally went right over my head is the very pointed social commentary. Countless historical parallels—the struggle to

rebuild after the devastation of a world war, the rioting demonstrators, the hard-won economic prosperity—connect the Neo-Tokyo of 2019 AD to the Japan of the post-World War II era. Midway through the movie, the brooding colonel frets that, now the that hard work of reconstructing the city is done, its inhabitants have lost the energy that drove them to rebuild. But the antics of our bike-riding heroes suggest that, without a goal to strive for, this creative energy has instead twisted into aimless, chaotic destruction.

In other words, *Akira* is about the energy of youth—an energy that has no place in the well-ordered, prosperous modern era. In one of the movie's few philosophical monologues, heroine Kei—channeling one of the psychic “children”—traces the energy that made the rebuilding of Tokyo possible back to the primordial energy of the first amoeba, and further on to the Big Bang itself. This is the power the adults seek to harness with their psychic experiments, and their fear of it leads them to freeze the mental and physical development of their test subjects, trapping them in a state of eternal childhood.

Thus, the connection between what once struck me as unrelated plot points. The dreaded power of Akira, to which Tetsuo is the malevolent heir, is the same chaotic energy that inspires Kaneda's bike rampages and the rioting of the demonstrators—a connection that Tetsuo seems to acknowledge when he drapes himself in the same blood-red fabric that serves as the demonstrators' flag. And just as the thwarted drive of Neo-Tokyo's citizens turns upon itself in random destruction and violence, ultimately Tetsuo's own flesh rebels against him, roiling with a senseless energy for which he can find no outlet or release.

When I first watched *Akira*, I saw a mishmash of collapsing buildings and exploding heads—full of sound and fury, but signifying very little. Now I see a savage allegory of a stagnant society and the rebels who seek to give it a much-deserved kick in the butt. And who knows? Perhaps, when I watch it ten years from now, it'll be yet another movie again.

—Mark Simmons



Initially playing only in selected theaters in New York, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, *Akira* is scheduled to release on newly remastered VHS video and DVD this July; check the official web site, www.akira2001.com for more information.



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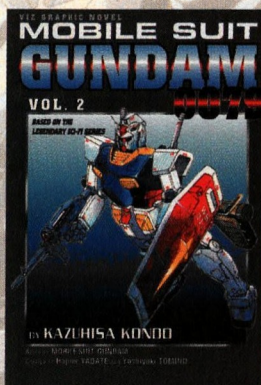
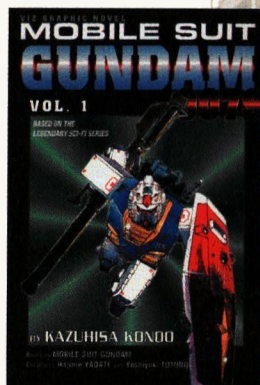
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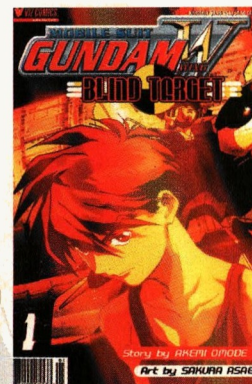


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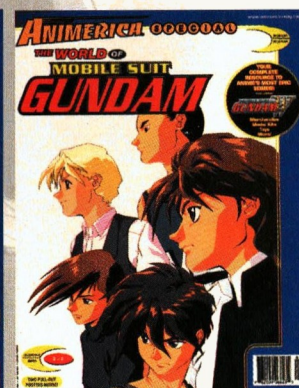
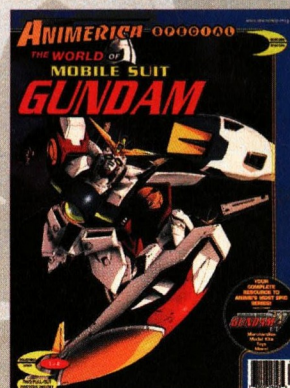
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WHAT'S
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An employee evaluation gone awry? A terrifying "Nanocyclsmic" future? Kei as an overweight fast food employee? Say it isn't so! Well, it is...but to see how this all adds up, you have to check out the full-color edition of Adam Warren's originally black-and-white comic **Dirty Pair: Sim Hell** this May, as it's being reissued in a new "remastered" version, with new front and back covers and eight bonus art pages per issue. Plus, you can show your love for the Lovely Angels with a **Dirty Pair** Zippo lighter or Kei & Yuri shot glasses and, in June, Kei and Yuri T-shirts!

Also this month, Dark Horse is reissuing **Orion** by Masamune Shirow (**Appleseed**, **Ghost in the Shell**) in graphic novel format. As always, Shirow's artwork is detailed and elaborately beautiful; in this case, you also get a healthy dose of Eastern philosophy from Shirow's own, er, fascinating perspective, with maniacal god Susano and the scantily clad Seska. It's a head trip by any measure. **Dirty Pair Sim Hell Remastered** from Dark Horse Comics: four-issue mini-series on sale 2 May; 32 full-color pages; US\$2.99 • **Dirty Pair T-shirts**; on sale 20 June, youth sizes S-XL/adult sizes M-XXL; US\$17.99-\$19.99 each; **Dirty Pair shotglasses and Zippo** on sale 13 June; US\$5.99 (shotglass)/US\$29.99 (Zippo) • **Orion** graphic novel: on sale 16 May; 272 b/w pages; US\$19.95. ★

Dirty Pair™ and © Haruka Takachino
Dirty Pair: Sim Hell © Adam Warren and Studio Protos



MOVIE

FINAL FANTASY

The year is 2065 and Earth is under siege. A meteor has crashed onto the planet, unleashing millions of alien creatures that are threatening to extinguish all life. Surviving humans have retreated to barrier cities, walled inside for protection; still, humanity is in decline. And yet there is a chance—Dr. Aki Ross, brilliant and beautiful, may be Earth's last hope against extinction. Terminally infected by an alien, Aki holds the key to discovering the secret to defeating the alien predators. Opposing her approach is General Hein, who'd rather wipe out the aliens—and possibly the Earth too—with a giant space cannon....

Easily the biggest Japanese import movie release since **Pokémon: The First Movie**, **Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within** utilizes the same kind of hyper-realistic computer graphics as the current Dreamworks movie **Shrek**, but hey, man, this is **Final Fantasy**! Until the movie opens this July, check out the official **Final Fantasy** web site (www.finalfantasy.com), with plenty of info on the production, voices, image gallery, downloadable wallpaper, and more. Look for more on the movie release in our next issue! **Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within**: in theaters in the U.S. starting 11 July. ★



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VIDEO

FUSHIGI YÜGI • BASTARD!!

Just as outlet stores like Costco cater to folks who like to buy a decade's worth of shampoo and mustard at a time, Pioneer has some new goodies to tempt those who prefer to buy their anime in bulk. First up is a box set collecting all three volumes—nine episodes in all—of the **Fushigi Yûgi** OVA series, in which Miaka and Tamahome find out that sometimes a book just can't put you down. Then comes the three-volume **Bastard!!** video series, which provides a rather more head-banging take on the fantasy genre; the three volumes are also available as individual VHS videotapes for a mere US\$9.98 apiece, but devoted Dark Schneider fans will want to spring for the deluxe **Bastard!! Limited Edition** DVD, which includes an exclusive Kotobukiya action figure. **Fushigi Yûgi OVA Box Set** from Pioneer; on sale 29 May; Bilingual DVD; US\$74.98. • **Bastard!!** from Pioneer; on sale 5 June; Subtitled VHS/English VHS/Bilingual DVD; US\$29.98/\$29.98/\$29.98 (\$49.98 with action figure). ★

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WHAT'S
NEW IN
AMERICA?



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TV

DRAGON BALL

The Cartoon Network, already committed to broadcasting the entire run of the smash hit *Dragon Ball Z*, is now going to revisit the roots of Akira Toriyama's superheroic saga. Throughout the month of June, Saiyan fans can check out the original 28-episode *Dragon Ball* series and witness the wacky hijinks of young Goku and his oddball buddies. The episodes will air at 5:30 p.m. EST—right after the grimmer-and-grittier *Dragon Ball Z*—and will retain the music used in the original Japanese versions. Hardcore fighting fans might find Goku's salad days a little cutesy, but fear not—the Cartoon Network also plans to kick off the remaining 96 episodes of *Dragon Ball Z* this summer. *Dragon Ball* and *Dragon Ball Z* from FUNimation Productions; *Dragon Ball* starts 25 June on the Cartoon Network. ★



TV

POKÉMON

You may be over *Pokémon* by now...or not...but the franchise still plugging along with *Pokémon Gold* and *Silver* still in the top-sellers' lists, the third *Pokémon* movie opening in the box-office Top 10 in theaters nationwide, and the occasional *Pokémon*-related product popping up to remind us all that it hasn't gone away by a long shot. This time, it's *Pikachu Meets the Press*, a collection of the short-lived *Pokémon* newspaper strips. Written by Gerard Jones and drawn by Japanese artist Ashura Benimaru (from Creatures, the original company behind the *Pokémon* phenomenon), the *Pokémon* newspaper strip ran in U.S. newspapers from 2000 to 2001. Grab this collector's item and years from now, you can marvel at the heights to which Japanese animation had, for a brief time, risen in the U.S. *Pikachu Meets the Press* from Viz Comics: on sale 4 May; 135 b&w pages; US\$9.95. ★



© 1995-2001 Nintendo, CREATURES, GAME FREAK. © 2001 Gerard Jones/Ashura Benimaru/Viz Communications & © Nintendo, CREATURES, GAME FREAK.



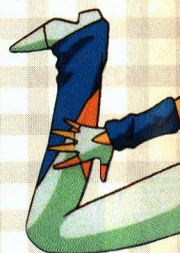
CD

ANIME TOONZ PRESENTS KIKUKO INOUE

You've heard her as the voice of *Oh My Goddess!*'s Belldandy, *Ranma 1/2*'s Kasumi Tendo, and *El-Hazard*'s Rune Venus...now you can hear Kikuko Inoue lend her vocal stylings to dance mixes of your favorite anime theme songs! After releasing some 30 albums in Japan, the popular Japanese voice-actor makes her U.S. debut with *Anime Toonz Presents Kikuko Inoue*, backed up by an international trio of DJs—Japan's Small Jet, and America's KGK and Beta. The CD includes Inoue's take on songs from *Sailor Moon*, *Utena*, *Cardcaptor Sakura*, *Fushigi Yûgi*, *Rayearth*, *Oh My Goddess!*, *Escaflowne*, and more, and is wrapped up in a yummy cover illustration by *Utena* character designer Shinya Hasegawa. *Anime Toonz Presents Kikuko Inoue* from Jellybean Recordings; on sale now; US\$16.97. ★



animetoonz
PRESENTS KIKUKO INOUE





© 1999 MUK • Supervision • Toho



VIDEO

NADIA: THE SECRET OF BLUE WATER

Back before anyone had their minds blown by *Evangelion* or their lifestyles changed by *Otaku no Video*, a little studio called Gainax created a freewheeling, Jules Verne-inspired pastiche called *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water*. *Nadia* finally reached the U.S. last year, a decade after its Japanese debut, when ADV began releasing it in subtitled VHS format. (No, we haven't forgotten the eight episodes released by Streamline Pictures in the early '90s, but ADV has made it through the whole series—the final volume is due May 22.) Now, *Nadia* is hitting the big time—or at least the mass market—with a domestic English-dubbed video and bilingual DVD release. Will we miss ze outrrageous French accents of Streamline's adaptation? Somehow, we theenk not. And in the meantime, see our Vol. 8, No. 4 feature for more on the *Nadia* story (and look forward to another big feature this fall!). *Nadia: The Secret of Blue Water Volume 1* from ADV Films; on sale 19 June; English VHS/Bilingual DVD; US\$19.98/\$29.98. ★



VIDEO

ASSEMBLE: INSERT

There's thinking outside the box, and then there's thinking waaaaay outside the box. In the anime parody *Assemble: Insert*, a beleaguered and booze-addled police section chief hits on a bold new plan to counter a raging crime wave. Regular cops unable to hold their own against power-suited gangsters? Then why not distract the public with a adorable crime-fighting superstar! In short order, the civic authorities recruit winsome, innocent, and super-strong Maron Namikaze to divert attention from their little problem. But now comes the greatest challenge of all—molding Maron into a crooning, dancing, idol singer. If you thought that character designer Masami Yuki and mecha designer Yutaka Izubuchi came up with an unconventional take on law enforcement in their *Mobile Police Patlabor*, then you really ain't seen nothing yet. *Assemble: Insert* from Right Stuf; on sale 29 May; English VHS/Bilingual DVD; US\$19.98/\$24.95. ★

© Masami Yuki/Tohoku Shinsha/Studio Core



NEWS

CONVENTION UPDATE

Anime Conventions Across the Globe!

6 April-1 August • Anime Marathon 2001

Location: Tagungs und Bildungszentrum der Deutschen Telekom, Stuttgart-Vaihingen, Stuttgart University Campus, Stuttgart, Germany

Address: Anime Marathon 2001 Registration c/o Ron Carow, Büchnerweg 100, D-12489, Berlin, Germany

Phone: +49-30-67895332

Fax: +49-30-67895280

E-Mail: marathon@tomodachi.de

Web Site: <http://anime.no.tomodachi.de/html/marathon/index-e.html>

125-27 May • Animazement

Location: Sheraton Imperial Hotel & Convention Center, Durham, NC

Guests: Rick Forrester, Scott Houle, Akira Kamiya, Tsukasa Kotobuki, Tony Schnur, Amy Tipton, Koichi Tsunoda, Yu Watase, Pamela Wiedner, Yasuo Yamaguchi

Membership Rates: US\$45 by 1 May

Hotel Prices: US\$85; call (919) 941-5050 or (800)-325-3535 for reservations

E-mail: maxwellj@ipass.net

Web Site: www.animazement.org

25-27 May • Anime North

Location: Toronto Airport Marriott Hotel, Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Guests: Steve Bennett, Stephanie Brown, Tristen Citrine, Julie Davis, Ben Dunn, Shimpei Itoh, Fred Ladd, Mio Odagi, Johnny Pham, Sailor Jamboree, Doug Smith, Taki Terishima

Membership Rates: CAN\$40 at the door

Address: Anime North, c/o 180 Columbia Drive, Hamilton, Ontario L9C 3Y6, Canada

E-mail: info@animenorth.com

Web Site: www.animenorth.com

1-3 June • Project A-Kon XII

Location: Westin Park Central & Sheraton Park Central, Dallas, TX

Guests: Will Allison, Steve Bennett, Richard Biggs, Jessica Calvillo, Jason Carter, Cameron Clarke, Doug Dlin, Lee Duhlig, Pat Duke, Ben Dunn, Joe Dunn, P.N. Elrod, Newton Ewell, Tiffany Grant, Matthew High, Haruna Ikezawa, Eric Johnson, Tsukasa Kotobuki, Nathan Lumm, Helen McCarthy, Phillip Nelson, Masami Obar, Eddie Perkins, Fred Perry, Paul Riddell, Joe Rosales, Chris Sabat, Sean Schemmel, Diana X. Sprinkle, Brian Stelfreeze, Nov Takahashi, Meredith Thompson, Jochen Weltjens, Mel White, Joe Wight, Jeffery Willerth, Elin Winkler

Membership Rates: US\$32 preregistered

Hotel Prices: Westin Park Central: US\$100/night (single~quad) or higher for deluxe rooms or suites; Sheraton Park Central: US\$90/night (single~quad), call 1-800-WESTIN for reservations (for either hotel), must mention special con rate

Address: Phoenix Entertainment, 3352 Broadway Blvd. Suite 470, Garland, TX 75043

Fax: (972) 926-1527

E-mail: info@a-kon.com

Web Site: www.a-kon.com

NEWS

CONVENTION UPDATE

Continued from Previous Page

15-17 June • Anime Mid-Atlantic

Location: Holiday Inn Select/Koger South Conference Center, Richmond, VA

Guests: Steve Bennett, Austell Callwood, Colleen Doran, Nicky Froberg, Hazeman, The People's Cartoonist, Steve Pearl, Doug Smith, John and Jason Waltrip

Membership Rates: US\$25 by 25 May

Hotel Prices: US\$84; call (804) 379-3800 or (800) 804-7380 for reservations; mention Anime Mid-Atlantic for special rate

Address: Anime Mid-Atlantic, P.O. Box 2636, Glen Allen, VA 23060

Web Site: www.animemidatlantic.com

15-17 June • Mikkan: New England's Anime Convention

Location: Radisson and Conference Center, Merrimack, NH

Guests: Tristan MacAvery, John Barrett, Neil Nadelman

Membership Rates: US\$35 at the door

Address: Mikkan, P.O. Box 137, Durham, NH 03824-0137

Web Site: <http://mikkakan.gehirn.net/>

23-24 June • Jafax 6

Location: Grand Valley State University, Allendale, MI

E-mail: anime@river.it.gvsu.edu

Web site: www2.gvsu.edu/~anime/jafax

5 July-8 July • Anime Expo

Location: Long Beach Convention Center, Long Beach Hyatt Hotel, Long Beach Westin Hotel, Long Beach, CA

Guests: Kia Asamiya, Noboru Ishiguro, Haruhiko Mikimoto

Membership Rates: US\$45 until 1 April; \$50 at the door

Hotel Prices: US\$135-\$160 per night (Hyatt Regency)/\$119/\$139 (Westin). Call (562) 491-1234 (Hyatt) or (562) 436-3000 (Westin) for reservations; mention Anime Expo for special room rate.

E-mail: reg@anime-expo.org

Web Site: www.anime-expo.org

14-15 July • Animethon

Location: Edmonton, Alberta, Canada

Guests: TBA

E-mail: animethon@anime-alberta.org

Web site: www.anime-alberta.org/animethon/index.html

14-15 July • Shoujocon

Location: Brunswick Hilton and Towers, Brunswick, NJ

Guests: Azzuri, Mandy Bonhomme

Membership Rates: US\$30 until 15 May; \$40 at the door

Hotel Prices: US\$95 per night; call 1-800-HILTONS or (732) 828-2000 for reservations (ask for special rate)

E-mail: admin@shoujocon.com

Web Site: <http://home.golden.net/~katchan/shoujocon>

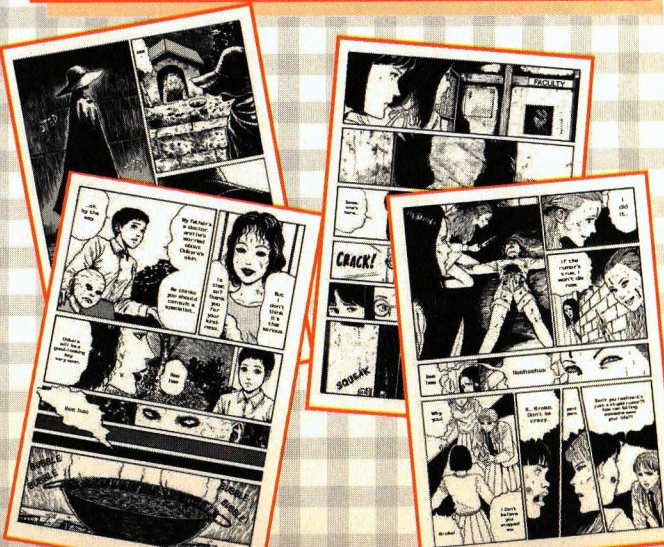
Costume photos from Ohayocon
by Kevin Lillard
(www.fansview.com)



MANGA

COMICSONE.COM

Online comics trailblazer ComicsOne.com, which launched last fall selling translated manga titles in electronic form, is now getting physical with a line of printed manga. This May, you'll be able to get your hands on five titles in a more tangible form as the first volume of each story arrives in old-fashioned print. These include the adventures of desert wanderer *Kazan*; android DJ *Maico 2010*, battling "guard maids" protect society from slimy mutants in a medieval-flavored post-apocalyptic future in *Sarai*; A brave little puppy wandering the world seeking his canine destiny in *Weed*; and *Tomie*, the disturbing saga of the unkillable girlfriend from hell, from your friend and mine, Junji "Hanging Balloon" Ito. And if like what you see, ComicsOne.com's virtual store shelves have lots more where these came from—more than 40 downloadable volumes of 21 different titles, from *Loan Wolf* and *Hamster Club* to spooky tales by Junji "Uzumaki" Ito, all available in Adobe eBook format for just \$2.95 each. *Sarai*, *Weed*, *Tomie*, *Kazan* and *Maico 2010* from ComicsOne.com; on sale in May; US\$9.95 each. ★





TV チャンス トライアングル セッション

CHANCE TRIANGLE SESSION

A radio drama broadcast in Japan in 1999, *Chance Triangle Session* is being adapted into an anime. Three very different girls go to see a concert of the top pop idol Reika, and by going to see this concert their lives are greatly influenced by it. Akari was raised in a very religious background; she is bright and cheerful and a big Reika fan. Yuki is an independent girl who ran away from her home in Hakodate. She is working in the concert hall where Reika's performance took place. Nozomi is the daughter from a wealthy family in Kobe. She's got one of the VIP seats at the concert. The three girls are so inspired by Reika's performance, that they all enroll in the Akiba music school and endeavor to become pop idols themselves. Direction on the series is by Susumu Kudo, character designs are by Fumie Muroi, anime production is by Madhouse. *Chance Triangle Session*: anime TV series; look to ANIMERICA for more information as it becomes available. ☆



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© R.G.A.P./SCP/CX • SYN



TV

パラッパラッパー

PARAPPA THE RAPPER

The popular PlayStation game *Parappa the Rapper* is being adapted into an animated TV series! The anime will be digitally rendered in 2D graphics, but is likely to have quite a different feel from the video game. The story is about a group of schoolkids, three boys and three girls, who, because of their endless curiosity, always seem to be involved whenever anything unusual happens in their town. And although Parappa's overactive imagination often gets in the way (we'd love to see what this means), the friends, *Scooby-Doo*-like, always seem to manage to solve any problems that come their way. *NEWTPE* magazine promises that *Parappa the Rapper*'s TV incarnation will be "a school love/adventure/sci-fi story!" Direction is by Hiroaki Matsura, with character designs by Takayuki Goto (*Blue Seed*), and new characters created for the anime by the original *Parappa* character designer Rodney A. Greenblatt. Animation production by J.C. Staff and Production IG. *Parappa the Rapper* is a production of Fuji Television and SME Visual Works. *Parappa the Rapper*: TV-series; on-air in Japan Saturdays @ 6:30 pm on Fuji TV. ☆



TV

デジモンテイマーズ

DIGIMON TEAMERS

In its third season, the new series title for *Digimon Adventures* will be *Digimon Teamers*. The new season will be set in the very near future in Nishi Shinjuku (West Shinjuku). The main characters will be Takato Matsuda, a quiet boy who is extremely passionate about Digimon; Lee, a boy whose father is from Hong Kong and whose mother is Japanese; and Ruki, a spunky girl who is a Digimon Card Game champion. Story concept by Akiyoshi Honkyo, series direction by Yukio Kaizawa, character designs by Katsuhiro Nakazuru. *Digimon Teamers*: animated TV series; on-air in Japan Sundays @ 9:00 a.m. on Fuji TV.



© Akiyoshi Honkyo • Toei Animation

WHAT'S
NEW IN
JAPAN?

© Tatsunoko Pro/The Soul Taker Production Committee/WOWOW

● TV

The Soul Taker

SOUL TAKER

In a post-nuclear holocaust world, Kyosuke Date is a kind-hearted boy who also happens to be a mutant with the ability to transform into an extremely powerful being called Soul Taker. In the story, he sets out on a journey to search for his twin sister, Runa, and to find out why his mother committed suicide. Through the process of battling his enemies to the death, he discovers the secrets that are buried deep within himself and within the corporation called the Kiriara Group. Stylish (and presumably violent, if the premise is anything to judge by), this series is one to watch out for—we've already heard rumors that it's on its way to TV in America. Check out the Japanese web site at <http://www.soulmaker.net>.

Direction on *Soul Taker* is by Akiyuki Shinbo, character designs are by Akio Watanabe, the design of the Soul Taker itself is by Kenji Hayama, with additional creature design works by Keiichi Sato (*Key the Metal Idol*, *The Big O*). *Soul Taker*: animated TV series; on-air in Japan; Wednesdays @ 11 p.m. on Wowow. ★

●

MOVIE

犬夜叉

INU-YASHA

So you probably already knew that Rumiko "Ranma 1/2" Takahashi's latest series *Inu-Yasha* has been made into an animated TV series, but now there's going to be a movie as well! Production details are sketchy as yet, but the historical fantasy adventure is scheduled for release in Japan this December. Check out our next issue for more on the manga and TV series. *Inu-Yasha*: in theaters in Japan December 2001; look to ANIMERICA for more information as it becomes available. ★

© 2000 Rumiko Takahashi/Shogakukan • TV Asehi



●

TV

逮捕しちゃうぞ

TAIHO SHICHAU ZÔ (YOU'RE UNDER ARREST!)

A new TV season of *Taiho Shichau Zô!*, a.k.a. *You're Under Arrest!*, featuring the misadventures of the Bokutô Precinct, has begun in Japan. This season, there's a new rookie on the squad—Saori Saga. She used to be a wild and uncontrolled high school student, but now, fresh out of the police academy, she's strictly by the book on everything. Miyuki and Natsumi try to show Saori how the real world operates, but will she listen to them? The other members of the team also return to the show, including Shoji Tokairin, Futaba Aoi, Yoriko Nikaido and Ken Nakajima. Story concept is by Kosuke Fujishima (*Oh My Goddess!*), direction is by Shogo Kawamoto, character designs are by Atsuko Nakajima (*Ranma 1/2*), mechanical designs by Shunji Murata, animation production by Studio Deen. *Taiho Shichau Zô!*: animated TV series; on-air in Japan on Saturdays at 5:30 on TBS.

© Kosuke Fujishima/TBS • Bandai Visual • Studio Deen

NEWS

TV UPDATE

Anime on TV in the U.S.!

ACTION CHANNEL www.starzencore.com
This Starz network cable channel airs anime, including complete series, on a rotating basis. In June, look for *Applesseed*, *Battle Arena Toshinden*, *Black Magic M-66*, *Macross II: Lovers Again*, *Macross Plus*, *New Dominion Tank Police*, and *Patlabor the Mobile Police*.

CARTOON NETWORK www.cartoonnetwork.com
The Cartoon Network's anime showcase Toonami airs weekdays and Saturdays. The June lineup includes *The Big O*, *Dragon Ball*, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Cardcaptors*, and *Tenchi Universe*.

CINEMAX www.cinemax.com
This cable movie channel shows a variety of anime at midnight; check your local listings for details.

ENCORE www.starzencore.com
This Starz network channel airs anime such as *Bubblegum Crisis*.

FOX FAMILY CHANNEL www.foxkids.com
The channel's Sunday morning Anime Invasion block airs *Flint the Time Detective*, *Megaman*, *Monster Rancher*, and *Digimon*.

FOX KIDS www.foxkids.com
On the Fox Network's Fox Kids block, look for *Digimon*.

INSPIRATION NETWORK www.insp.com
The religious cable channel INSP (based in Charlotte, NC) carries the anime series *Little Women* at 4:30 pm (ET) on Monday, Wednesday and Thursday. Tuesdays feature *Tom Sawyer* at 4:00 pm (ET) and *Little Women* at 4:30 pm (ET).

INTERNATIONAL CHANNEL www.i-channel.com
This cable station airs *Armored Trooper Votoms*, *Irresponsible Captain Tylor*, and (unedited) *Dragon Ball Z*.

INDEPENDENT FILM CHANNEL www.ifctv.com
This independent film showcase airs various anime titles on a rotating basis.

KIDS WB www.kidswb.com
Kids WB airs *Pokémon* every weekday in national syndication and on Saturday mornings. Look for classic *Pokémon* and *Pokémon: The Johto Journeys* (based on the *Pokémon Silver* and *Gold* games).

LOCOMOTION www.locomotion.com
This channel airs anime throughout Latin America, including *Evangelion*, *Blue Seed*, and *Bubblegum Crisis: Tokyo 2040*.

SCI-FI CHANNEL www.scifi.com
USA Networks' Sci-Fi Channel has begun showing anime again; keep your eyes on the listings for more anime showings.

SHOWTIME www.showtimeonline.com
Check listings for occasional anime feature film showings.

TELEMUNDO www.telemundo.com
Dragon Ball Z airs in Spanish on Telemundo. Check your local listings for dates and times.

TOON DISNEY www.disney.go.com/disneychannel/toondisney
The cable station Toon Disney lists *Hello Kitty* daily at 6:30 am ET (we've had reports that it's actually broadcast at 6:50 am).

TOONAMI REACTOR <http://www.cartoonnetwork.com/TOONAMI/reactor/>
Now supports Macs! *Star Blazers* episodes now joining *Dragon Ball Z* in the lineup.

TRINITY NETWORK www.tbn.org
Subscribers to this Christian cable network can find classic family anime series such as *Flying House* and *Super Book* on Saturday mornings at 6:30 and 7:00 am (ET), respectively.

LOCAL TV
Various independent U.S. TV stations air anime programs. The San Jose Public Broadcasting station KTEH-54 (www.kteh.org) airs anime between 10:00 and 11:00 pm (PT) on Sunday nights; recent offerings have included *Sakura Wars*, *Dirty Pair Flash*, and *Bubblegum Crisis*; check your local listings for details.

If your local channel airs anime, write to us and let us know so we can add it to this section. (Please include the city and the station's call letters.)

TV 電腦冒險記ウェブダイバー

DENNÔ BÔKEN-KI WEB DIVER

A new animated TV series, *Dennô Bôken-Ki Web Diver* ("Cyber Adventures Web Diver"), is set in the year 2100 where the world is tied together by a computer network. The children of the world become Web Diver, adapting their consciousness into data, and love to play together in the cyber park called Magical Gate. However, a mysterious computer virus appears beginning to destroy Magical Gate from the inside out. In cyberspace, programs called Web Knights have been created to protect the children. But the computer virus has turned all the Web Knights against the children. The only Web Knight to escape the "brainwashing" is Gladion, who seeks the help of fourth-grader Web Diver Kaito Yuki, and when a Web Knight and a Web Diver synchronize, they can have unlimited power. Will Kaito and Gladion's combined power be enough to save Magical Gate? Supervising direction is by Hiroshi Negishi (*Tenchi Muyo!*), chief direction is by Kunitoshi Okashima, character designs are by Naruyo Takahashi. *Dennô Bôken-ki Web Diver*: animated TV series; on-air in Japan Fridays @ 6:00 p.m. on TV Tokyo. ★

TV

コメットさん

COMET-SAN

The original *Comet-san*, which aired in 1964, was a live-action TV series about a girl from outer space. The series returned in 1978 as another live-action show. Now, for a third time, the ever popular *Comet-san*, returns—this time as an animated TV series. Comet-san is a princess from Harmonica Hoshiguni ("Star Land"). She is supposed to attend an arranged-marriage party where the Prince of Tambourine Hoshiguni is to choose between Comet-san and a princess from Castanet Hoshiguni for his prospective bride. This is to be a politically strategic wedding—Tambourine Hoshiguni is a most powerful political force and marriage into the royal family of Tambourine would mean a great deal to both Harmonica Hoshiguni and Castanet Hoshiguni. However, Comet-san doesn't want to marry some prince who she's never even met, so she thinks about running away. But then there is a big uproar because the Prince of Tambourine has run away first. After hearing rumors that the Prince has run away to Earth, the Ministers of Harmonica send Comet to search for him. Comet is happy to go because she's heard about Earth and has always wanted to go there. Direction is by Mamoru Kanbe, character designs are by Kazuaki Makida, and animation production is by Nippon Animation. *Comet-san*: animated TV series; on-air in Japan on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. on TV Tokyo. ★

anime
RADAR

NEWS

Anime Info for the Otaku Generation.™

JAPAN'S BESTSELLING MANGA

The bestselling comics, compiled by Books Nippan, Japan (based on sales figures as of 1/31/01)

1. *Inu-Yasha* • 19
Rumiko Takahashi • Shogakukan • ¥390
2. *Ppoi!* • 17
("Full of it")
Takako Yamazaki • Hakusensha • ¥390
3. *Paradise Kiss* • 2
Ai Yazawa • Shodensha • ¥857
4. *Love Hina* • 10
Ken Akamatsu • Kodansha • ¥390
5. *Rekka no Hon'nô* • 27
FLAME OF RECCA ("Raging Flame")
Nobuyuki Anzai • Shogakukan • ¥390
6. *Sekai de Ichiban Dai Kirai* • 10
("What I Hate the Most in the World")
Banri Hidaka • Hakusensha • ¥390
7. *Karakuri Circus* • 16
("Clockwork Circus")
Kazuhiro Fujita • Shogakukan • ¥390
8. *Kaikan ♥ Phrase* • 17
("Ecstasy Phrase")
Mayu Shinjo • Shogakukan • ¥390
9. *Shin Seiki Evangelion* • 6
NEON GENESIS EVANGELION
Yoshiyuki Sadamoto • Kadokawa Shoten • ¥540
10. *Shanimuni Go* • 7
("Just Go")
Marimo Ragawa • Hakusensha • ¥390

犬夜叉

っポイ!

Paradise Kiss

ラブひな

烈火の炎

世界でいちばん大嫌い

からくりサーカス

快感 フレーズ

新世紀エヴァンゲリオン

しゃにむにGO

JAPAN'S BESTSELLING ANIME

The bestselling animated videos (on DVD), compiled by Original Confidence Research Company (as of 2/5/01)

1. *Gekijôban: Kidô Senshi Gundam III*
MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: THE MOVIE III
Bandai Visual • ¥7800
2. *Gekijôban: Kidô Senshi Gundam II*
MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: THE MOVIE II
Bandai Visual • ¥7800
3. *Gekijôban: Kidô Senshi Gundam I*
MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: THE MOVIE I
Bandai Visual • ¥7800
4. *Gekijôban: Cardcaptor Sakura:*
Fûin Sareta Card
(CARDCAPTOR SAKURA, The Movie, "The Sealed Card")
Bandai Visual • ¥9800
5. *Love Hina • Process 6*
King Record • ¥7500
6. *X-Driver • Vol. 3*
Bandai Visual • ¥5000
7. *Hand Maid May Memory 4/5*
PLD • ¥5500
8. *Top o Nerae! • Vol. 2*
AIM FOR THE TOP! GUNBUSTER
Bandai Visual • ¥5800
9. *Shin Gettâ Robo-Tai Neo Gettâ Robo •*
Change 1
CHANGE! GETTER ROBO
Bandai Visual • ¥2000
10. *Seikai no Senki • Vol. 5*
("Battle Flag of the Stars")
Bandai Visual • ¥5000

機動戦士ガンダムIII

機動戦士ガンダムII

機動戦士ガンダムI

カードキャプターさくら 封印されたカード

ラブひな

エクストライバー

HANDMAID メイ

トップをねえ!

真ゲッターロボ対ネオゲッターロボ

星界の戦旗

AMERICA'S BESTSELLING MANGA

Based on preorders (of single-issue comics), compiled by Diamond Distribution Company (during the month of April 2001)

1. *Sailor Moon #30*
Naoko Takeuchi • Tokyopop Press • US\$2.95
2. *Dark Angel: Phoenix Resurrection*
Kia Asamiya • Image • US\$2.95
3. *Oh My Goddess! Part X, #3 Another Me*
Kosuke Fujishima • Dark Horse Comics • US\$3.50
4. *Dragon Ball Z Part 4 #5*
Akira Toriyama • Viz Comics • US\$2.95
5. *Gundam Wing Episode Zero #1*
Katsuyuki Sumisawa and Akira Kanbe • Viz Comics • US\$2.99

AMERICA'S BESTSELLING ANIME

Based on preorders compiled by Diamond Distribution Company (during the month of April 2001)

1. *Rurouni Kenshin • Vol. 7: Shadow of the Wolf*
[Bilingual DVD]
Anime Works • US\$29.95
2. *Gundam Wing Operation 7*
[Bilingual DVD]
Bandai • US\$24.98
3. *Sailor Moon: And in This Corner... Sailor Venus*
[English VHS]
ADV Films • US\$12.98
4. *Gundam Wing • Vol. 12: The Collapse of Peace*
[English VHS, uncut]
Bandai • US\$14.98
5. *Gundam Wing • Vol. 13: White Fang*
[English VHS, uncut]
Bandai • US\$14.98

© Rumiko Takahashi/Shogakukan, Inc.

#1
Manga

Inu-Yasha



PLEASE NOTE: Our translations are indicated with parentheses and quotes, while English titles provided by the author/publisher are set in all caps.



DOMESTIC ANIME RELEASES

All info is as accurate and timely as possible; however, last-minute changes do occur. Some titles are available earlier when ordered directly from their U.S. manufacturer. Unless other languages are noted, "bilingual" refers to English and Japanese audio tracks.

MAY 2001

- 5/01 AD Police Files**
[Subtitled VHS]
AnimEigo • US\$19.95
- 5/01 Baoh**
[English VHS]
AnimEigo • US\$9.95
- 5/01 Bubblegum Crash Total Crash Collection**
[English VHS/Subtitled VHS]
AnimEigo • US\$19.95/\$19.95
- 5/01 Kimagure Orange Road TV • Vols. 1-12**
[Subtitled VHS]
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The Magic User's Club

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9)

AKANE AIKAWA

The newest member of the MUC, Akane is always going on dates with a variety of older men. Her magical abilities are quite strong for someone who doesn't practice much, although every spell she uses causes the target to spin madly first.

SAE SAWANOGUCHI

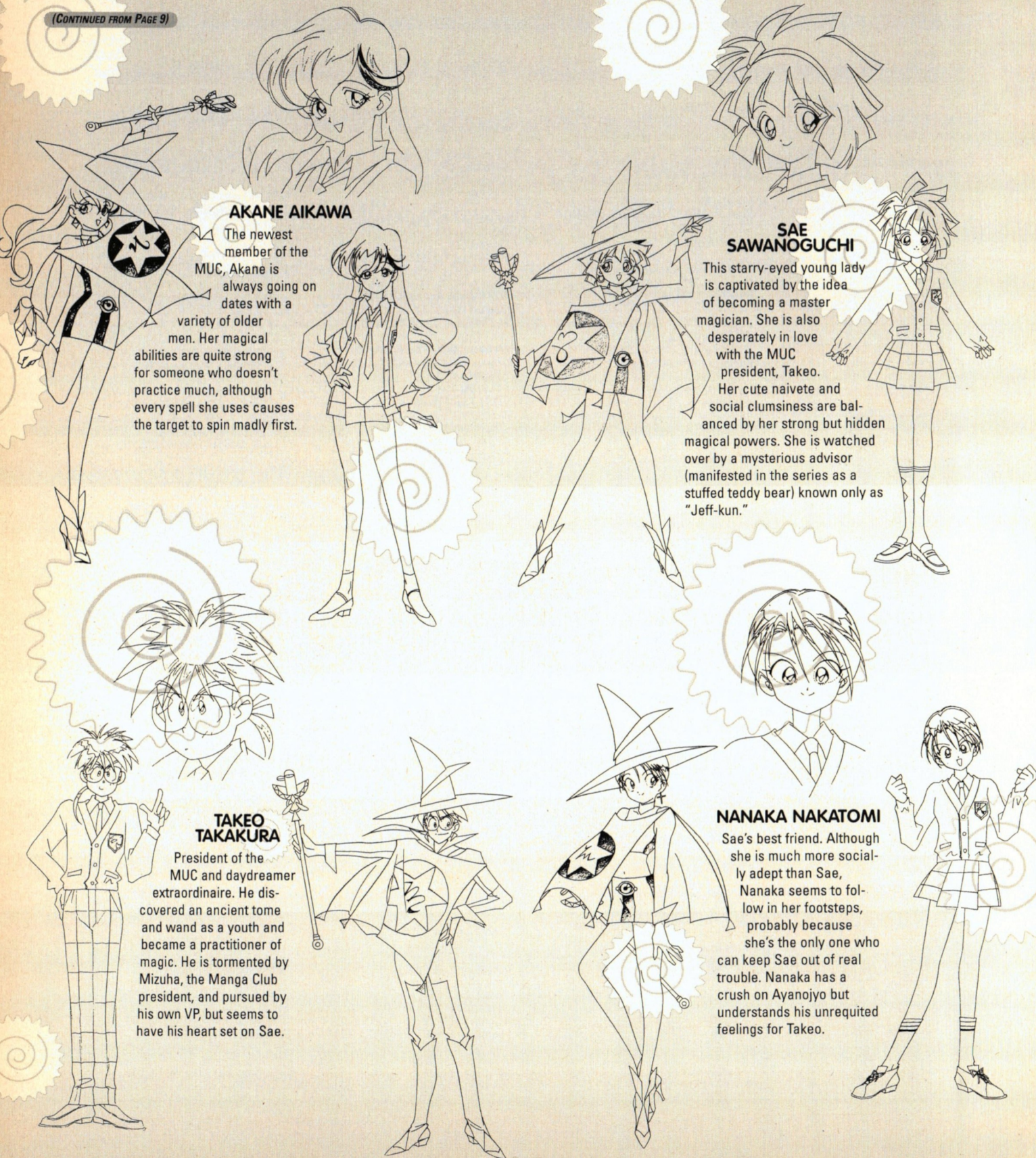
This starry-eyed young lady is captivated by the idea of becoming a master magician. She is also desperately in love with the MUC president, Takeo. Her cute naivete and social clumsiness are balanced by her strong but hidden magical powers. She is watched over by a mysterious advisor (manifested in the series as a stuffed teddy bear) known only as "Jeff-kun."

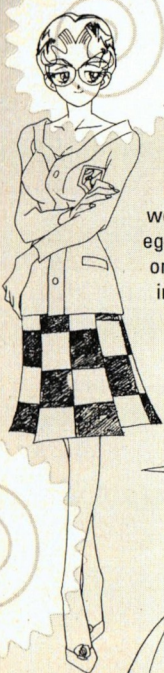
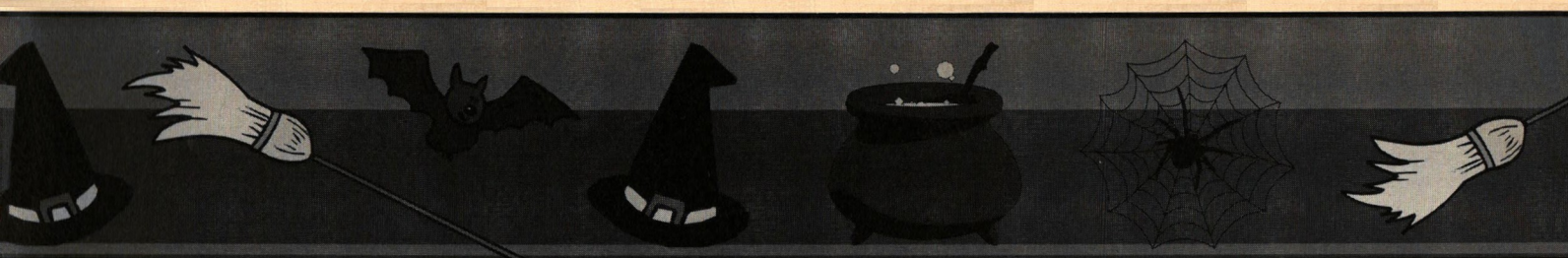
TAKEO TAKAKURA

President of the MUC and daydreamer extraordinaire. He discovered an ancient tome and wand as a youth and became a practitioner of magic. He is tormented by Mizuha, the Manga Club president, and pursued by his own VP, but seems to have his heart set on Sae.

NANAKA NAKATOMI

Sae's best friend. Although she is much more socially adept than Sae, Nanaka seems to follow in her footsteps, probably because she's the only one who can keep Sae out of real trouble. Nanaka has a crush on Ayanojojo but understands his unrequited feelings for Takeo.





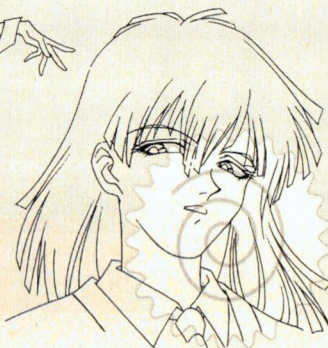
MIZUHA MIYAMA

The president of the MUC's rival, the Manga Club. Backed by an army of yes-girls, a bestselling manga, and a body that Barbie® would be jealous of, Mizuha is a sad, egotistical, spiteful young woman whose only pleasure in life seems to be torturing Takeo.



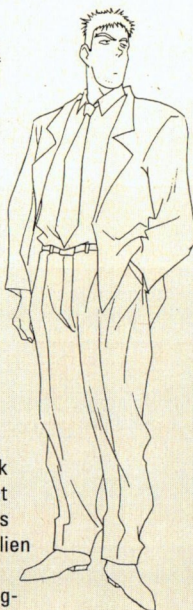
AYANOJYO ABURATSUBO

The resident pretty boy and vice president of the MUC. His flirtations with Takeo are often distracting to the young president, and he treats Sae poorly, calling her a "burden." However, Ayanojyo has quite a bit of skill with magic and, in the end, a kind heart.

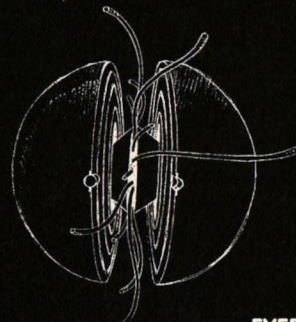


MINORU MINOWA & YOSHITO YOSHIMOTO

A reporter (right) and his photographer sidekick (left). These two are reminiscent of Clark Kent and Jimmy Olsen. Minowa (the reporter) is trying to find the true motivations of the alien invaders and stumbles across the MUC, falling for Akane in the process. Shutterbug Yoshito is begrudgingly along for the ride.

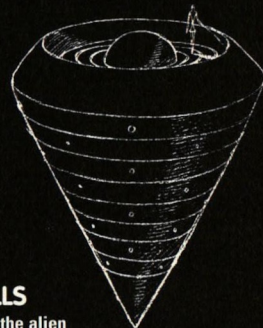


THE TSURINAGE



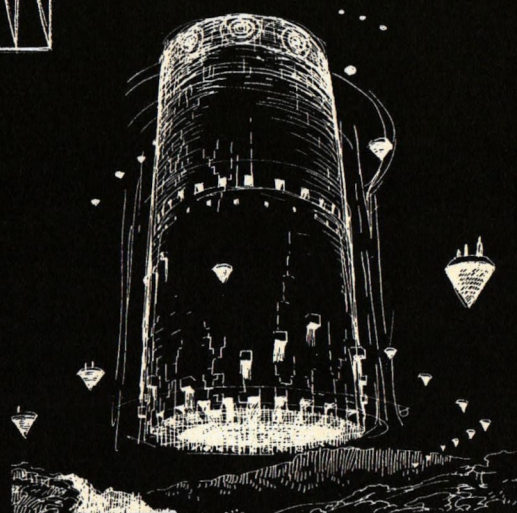
EYEBALLS

The most numerous of the alien probes. They can be found everywhere in the city and are as unobtrusive as possible for a 7-foot metal spheres. They also act as carriers for other units.



HUMANOIDS

Skinny, doll-like robots with propellers on their heads. These machines are also equipped with probing tentacles and a disintegration beam that, like all the alien weapons, affects only nonliving things.



THE BELL

The immense alien mothership and computer core. Similar to the subterranean attack towers from *Super Atragon*, the Bell (so called because it resembles a traditional-style Japanese bell) is the core of the alien operations on Earth and wanders the globe examining everything about our planet. The Bell itself usually sits out in the ocean, covered in layer of clouds, while its probes search the cities and towns. ☆

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 15)

ANIMERICA: The question that is probably on everybody's minds is—why do you keep returning to this [*Kenroh Densetsu* setting]?

Oshii: [LAUGHS] Every time I work on one of these projects, I think it will be the last one. For some reason, I don't know why, but someone will come to me with another project offer. I have never gone into one of these projects with the impetus from my side. Two years after I finished the first film [in the *Kenroh* setting], a manga editor approached me and asked if I wanted to turn it into a manga. I worked with the manga artist Kamui Fujiwara, and we made part 1. After that, Bandai approached me with an offer to do another movie. So we made the second movie, *Kerberos* ("Cerebus"), this time more as an action movie. I thought that was the end of it. After all, the film wasn't received well, and it wasn't popular. I thought it was over, but they came to me again, and we all rushed around to do part 2 of the manga.

ANIMERICA: Do you think you will return to it yet again?

Oshii: I believe so. I've already been commissioned to do a novel, so its next form will be a novel. [This interview was conducted in 2000; the novel has since been published.]

ANIMERICA: After you saw the finished version of *Jin-Roh*, did you feel that it accomplished everything you wanted it to? Or were there things left out that it didn't fulfill?

Oshii: I was only the screenplay writer. After that, I let Okiura do whatever he wanted with it. Okiura is a very stubborn person. He has a lot of confidence in himself. Even though he is young, he believes he is great. If anybody tells him different, he doesn't listen to them. So I thought it would have been pointless for me to say anything. I let him do whatever he wanted with it. That was what we agreed on from the start. However, I told him I would write the screenplay, but I would not do any rewrites. He was to do the first script that I gave him. That was our agreement. After its second or third year in production, Okiura came and asked me about the guns and about how to make the modified weapons. That was about it. He did everything on his own. Since I originally thought I was going to do it, I had collected a lot of reference materials such as photograph collections and books of Japan of that era. I lent everything to him. There were also videotapes. I bought a number of videos of movies that used Japan in that era as the location. There is one American movie by a director named Samuel Fuller. It's a film from that time period (the film is from 1955) that was shot on location in Japan, called *House of Bamboo*. It's a famous action gang movie. I think the department-store scene [in *Jin-Roh*] was greatly influenced by this film. I lent Okiura all the various references I had collected. I didn't do anything more than that. I had been thinking that if I felt it was poorly done, then I would have to start a fight with him. But I thought it was done very well, and there was no reason to fight.

ANIMERICA: So you were satisfied with it?

Oshii: I was very satisfied.

ANIMERICA: Do you think that Okiura was satisfied with it?

Oshii: He accomplished everything he set out to do. You know, there were problems with the production—it was delayed for over a year, and everyone was tired. I think it was a film that was worth all that.

ANIMERICA: In terms of the time period, exactly when was it set?

Oshii: Around Showa 30 (1956) or the late '50s to the early '60s.

ANIMERICA: But the weapons and such in *Jin-Roh* were ...

Oshii: They were advanced for that time period. Some of the technology is more advanced, and some of it is behind. The machine guns and guns were weapons from the war, but the video cameras and the protective gear is closer to today's technology. So there's a discrepancy [with reality]. But that is the setting for that film.

ANIMERICA: The time period is not specifically stated in the film

Oshii: It's not a story set in the *reality* of postwar Japan, but a "What if" story of postwar Japan.

ANIMERICA: So in that world, Japan won the war.

Oshii: Japan lost. But they didn't lose to America. They lost to Germany. That's why the designs are based on the German military.

ANIMERICA: But they don't all speak German or anything...

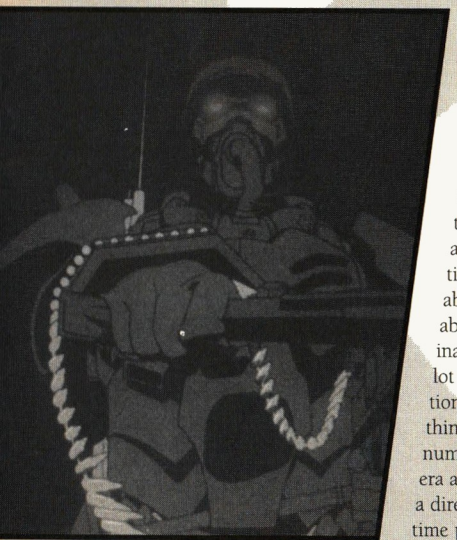
Oshii: But some German does come up in some of the dialogue. In the film you can't really tell, but German does come up in the dialogue. And the Little Red Riding Hood picture book is written in German. The last song is also done in a German style.

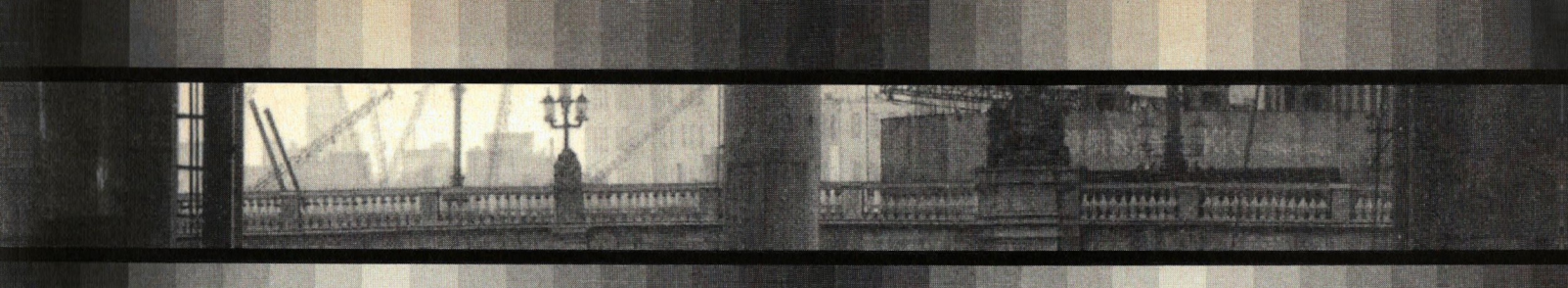
ANIMERICA: Where did you get the idea to use the original Little Red Riding Hood story?

Oshii: I wanted to use it from the beginning. So I first thought of the structure of the movie, and I thought up the story later. In the film, the fairy tale progresses synchronous to the progression of the story of the film. I wanted to make a film in that format.

ANIMERICA: Was it before or after Okiura made his request for a story of man and woman?

Oshii: I've always wanted to use the Little Red Riding Hood story because I like it. It's a story of man and animals. More specifically, it's about wolves. They're not dogs, but they are in the same family. And that's why I wanted to use this fairy tale. Little Red Riding Hood and the wolf meet and together follow through to a sad fate. I changed it to a story of a man and a woman. Now, Okiura took it as a pure story of a man and woman, but I cannot write and am not interested in that type of sad love story between a man and a woman. I don't really care about that kind of thing. [LAUGHS] A person and a dog meet and end up with a sad outcome. That's what I've always done, so that's all I could do for this story. Okiura may not have been satisfied with it, so the film





is the story of Fuse and Little Red Riding Hood. For me, it was a story of an animal and a person meeting each other. A sad love story between a person and a wolf. That was my intention.

ANIMERICA: Returning to the subject of the military, could you share your thoughts on how you feel about the military and the police.

Oshii: I don't like the police. I've never liked the police, and even now I hate the police. I don't know why this is, but for some reason, I've only done stories about the police. *Patlabor* was about police, and so was *Ghost in the Shell*. After I did this story from the *Akai Megane* setting, I realized that I've always done police stories.

ANIMERICA: But you don't like them.

Oshii: But I don't like them. The police system is a very interesting world, especially the Japanese police force. When you do research about them, there are a lot of interesting stories that would make good movies. I've never really portrayed anyone that was separated from or outside of the system, and I don't think I would be able to do so. That leaves only the police force, the military, or the school system. From my perspective, all three are very similar. How to depict an individual that is part of a group. How an individual lives freely. How he expresses his own will and how the group or organization is structured so that it will go against that. It is all about how the two sides will or will not be resolved, or how the organization will be fooled. Those are the kinds of things that have always been on

my mind.

An example would be how I was thinking about becoming a schoolteacher. In a school, the position I am in right now as a director would be like a teacher. In the military, it's like being an officer. In the police force, it's like being a police chief. How do I do what I want to within the context of the group I am working in? How will things get done? How can I not betray everyone's expectations but still do what I want to? These are things that are always on my mind. As a result, I don't have a difficult time with police stories or the military. Because it is the same thing as what is in my own thoughts. I don't really know why, but now that is all I am able to do.

ANIMERICA: But the police or the military—they're usually the bad guys, right?

Oshii: Yes, I suppose so. That is their image, isn't it? In my own mind, the police are...the bad guys. I don't know if you should actually call them bad guys. It's not limited to the police. Organizations always have this element, no matter what type of organizations they are. It's the same with companies. In a company, for example, you are a magazine editor, How will you create a magazine that you like? How will you put together a feature that you like? How will you fool the company president into letting you do what you want? How will you do what you want? It's exactly the same. But this is something that you cannot do on your own. You have to have help from various people in the company, or you will not be able to do what you want to. You don't want to betray those people's expectations, and you also want to be able to help those people out as well. At the same time, what you want to do comes first. That is what the issue is. And for an individual, you can only see the negative side.

ANIMERICA: I got the feeling from the film that the terrorists... I felt that the police were terrorists acting on the side of the government.

Oshii: [LAUGHS] That's how I feel. The country—or the police/military—commit terrorist acts that are accepted by the government. The laws of the police force or the wars of the military are all approved by the government. They are all committing acts of terrorism with public sanction. In a time of peace, that is not good—to kill people off in secret. We are told that these things are necessary. In those terms, it's the same with terrorists. They feel that they have to do what they do. Terrorists say that they are at war. It's just that the rest of the world does not accept their war. The actions of the government, by the police or the military, are accepted. But they are all using violence as a means to an end.

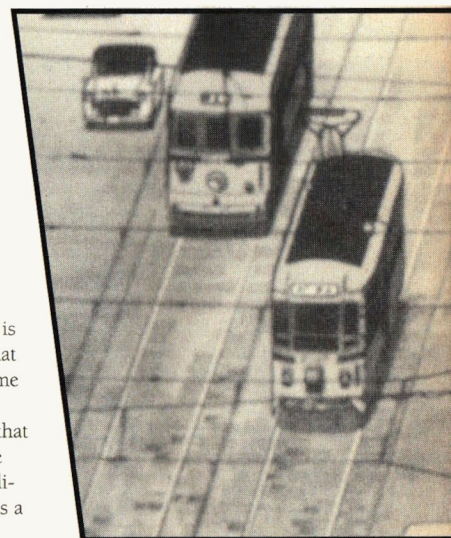
ANIMERICA: What would you say is worthy of note in the film?

Oshii: I am surprised, myself, that it contains many elements that have never been a part of my previous work. To be specific, it has emotion. In other words, it can make you cry. Watching the film, even I felt a few tears. I was surprised, myself—wow, I wrote a film that can evoke tears. Of course, as director, Okiura's



COLOR AND SHADOWS

The position of art director on *Jin-Roh* is occupied by Hiromasa Ogura, whose previous work includes *The Wings of Honneamise* (1987), *Patlabor* (1989), *Patlabor 2* (1993), and *Ghost in the Shell* (1995). In all of those films, Ogura's talent for creating recognizable cityscapes, even imagined ones such as in *The Wings of Honneamise*, was a major contribution to the believability, the "reality" of their respective visions. In *Jin-Roh*, Ogura recreated a post-WWII Tokyo that never quite existed, blending the landscapes and technology of a time that seems a part of history, yet never really was, in subtle monochrome washes, with vividly bright splashes of color marking outbursts of violence.





influence was great. It would have been different if I were the director.

ANIMERICA: It would have been a different film?

Oshii: It would have been a completely different film. Most certainly. It would have been more rugged and logical, one of my typical films. Okiura gave a detailed portrayal of love between a man and woman. They are in love, but they have to be apart. Okiura portrayed the story very well. I would not have been able to do it.

ANIMERICA: I'd like to take this opportunity to ask you about some movies I didn't understand—*Patlabor 1* and *2*.

Oshii: [LAUGHS]

ANIMERICA: Many fans went expecting to see an action anime or a robot anime but *Patlabors* did not play a part until the very end. Why was it that the movie edition ended up like that?

Oshii: The movie was like that because that was my original intention for it. As you know, the video series came out before the movie. That was six episodes. There are others, but I didn't do them. At that point, I thought it was no good.

ANIMERICA: But episode 5 and 6 seem to be very close to *Patlabor 2*.

Oshii: Yes, they are very similar. I thought that was how the story should end up. Others did not agree. If I had continued *Patlabor*, at some point it probably would have been canceled. When it became a movie...the good thing about movies is that nobody knows what will happen until the production is complete. With a series, the plot development is seen every week or every month. Even if you try to sneak in a surprise, everything is revealed. With a movie, even if it isn't finished in a year, nothing is revealed. That's why I like movies. And even if it is revealed, it's too late. Money was put into it, so it has to be released. If it is not released, then it won't make even one yen. Just completing a movie is a victory.

The moment I was approached to do [*Patlabor*], that was the kind of film I intended to do. If that wasn't the case, then I wasn't going to do it. I don't think any other directors would have been able to make [*Patlabor*] into a movie. If they think they could, I would have liked to see them try. [LAUGHS] I remember saying something to that effect. If we're going to do it, then you will let me have complete control, right? And they gave it to me, so that was what I made.

ANIMERICA: Were you satisfied with the end result?

Oshii: Oh, I was very satisfied with it. I am satisfied with both the first and second movies. But in particular, I am very satisfied with the second movie. The first one didn't achieve some things I wanted it to. Looking at it now, the first one is still a proper pop entertainment movie. I was surprised. It's cute. The characters still seem too manga-like. When I made it, there were complaints that the characters weren't done right. They were too rough. They're not cute.

Specifically, Noa is not cute at all. That's what I was told, and I was told to redraw all of it. I refused, and it became a pretty big deal.

Because at that time, over half the work was completed. They still told me to redo, but I refused. I told them, if you absolutely have to have it redone, then use another director.

ANIMERICA: The production of the OAV series was done by Headgear—a group of five people. It stopped existing after the end of the second movie, right?

Oshii: The company still exists today, but the five of us never meet. After the first movie, we had a big fight—about the contents of the movie, because that's the kind of movie it was. But after the second movie, we had a really big squabble. And fundamentally, we went our separate ways.

ANIMERICA: So the group broke up into two groups?

Oshii: Not two, three.

ANIMERICA: Three groups? Who ended up by himself? [LAUGHS]

Oshii: [LAUGHS] Bucchan ended up by himself.

ANIMERICA: There were talks of a third project. Is that still going on?

Oshii: Yes, it is.

ANIMERICA: It is called *Thirteen*?

Oshii: It is no longer called *Thirteen*. Now it is called *Three*, because "Thirteen" is unlucky. The project wasn't delayed because of the title, though. Japanese are superstitious, so they say the name was the cause of the bad luck, but that wasn't it at all. It was actually the lack of ability of the producer. So the name was changed, and it seems they restarted the project. They've been working on it for four years now. They started it before I did *Ghost*.

ANIMERICA: At that point, had you decided you were not going to work on *Three*?

Oshii: Yes.

ANIMERICA: So, Izubuchi is the only one left working on it?

Oshii: Yes, Bucchan is the producer.

ANIMERICA: I'd like to ask you about *Ghost*. Why was it so different from the manga? The look of the characters was rougher...

Oshii: Shirow's characters fundamentally have a cute look. The necks are thin, the heads are big, the breasts are big, and the hips are small. They look like dolls. That's fine for manga. But I've always said that manga and anime are different. The necessary elements are different. In animation there is movement. Having the characters move necessitates a frame and a sense of gravity. It's fine if you are going to have the characters flit about like Mickey Mouse, but if you want to have realistic characters move in a realistic world, you need to provide a sense of gravity. This is true especially when the background scenes are realistic and the story is tight. If it's a heavy film, then it doesn't match if you use those types of cute characters. Of course, there is the style, like Disney, where the scenery is realistic and the characters are cute. But I've always disliked that style. And that is because they are not movies—they are just picture books that move. Certainly, the images

are beautiful, but it's like Mickey Mouse moving around the scenery of *Uchû Senkan Yamato* ("Space Battleship Yamato"). Such types of anime are still produced in Japan today. Actually, the majority of anime is that way. The character design, the reality level of the art design, and the level of the story—I believe these should all match. If they don't, then the work will not be accepted by the audience as a movie. It just ends up being manga that moves or picture books that move. Of course, it is okay to have such types of anime—I'm not criticizing it. I just don't want to do such types of anime. That's how deeply I felt when I did *Ghost*.

ANIMERICA: That's interesting to hear from the director of *Urusei Yatsura*. [LAUGHS]

Oshii: Yes, and with *Urusei*, the scenery became increasingly realistic as we did the shows. The characters, however, continued to be manga characters. It didn't feel right to me.

ANIMERICA: Getting back to *Ghost*, the robot characters, the *fuchikoma*, did not appear in the anime, was it because of the cute...?

Oshii: It was the same reason. Those mascots...for Disney it would be small animals, and for Japan, it would be those petlike robots—they often appear. I've always found them unnecessary. I never could understand why they have to be flitting about.

ANIMERICA: At the end of *Ghost*, in the manga, the main character goes into the body of a man, but in the anime, the main character goes into the body of a woman. What was the reason for that change?

Oshii: It was because I found it repulsive to go into the body of a man. I don't want to see it. I was very interested in seeing a grown woman getting reborn as a little girl. I thought the image of that was better. It has nothing to do with cuteness... If a woman were to be transformed, I thought that would be how it would be. If they were going to become something different, what would they become? I think they wouldn't want to become a man. They would want to start over again. Start over again as a child. You don't know what that child is thinking. I thought that would evoke a scary quality. I wanted to discover if that cute little girl would be seen as an angel or a devil. So from the start, I intended to use a female character.

ANIMERICA: Could you picture, someday, putting your own brain into a robot?

Oshii: I wouldn't mind becoming a cyborg even now. My eyesight is becoming bad, my hearing has always been bad, and recently I've been having stomach problems. So my body is wearing down. I wouldn't mind becoming a cyborg.

ANIMERICA: If you were to do it, would you change yourself or would you want to stay as you are?

Oshii: When I was younger, I used to think that I wanted my legs to be 20 centimeters longer or wanted my eyes to be larger. After reaching middle age, I've come to like my crab-shaped body. I no longer think about such things...like wanting to be popular with women. And what it comes down to is that your own face is best. I still think that if my legs were 10 centimeters longer, I would be able

to wear more different types of clothes and such. I don't look good in anything because my legs are so short. [LAUGHS] I don't know about women, but I think most men feel the same way. No matter how miserable they are, they want to wake up in the morning and see their own face. I think it may be different for women.

That's what I was thinking about when I worked on *Ghost*. That was the first time I used a woman for the main character. I tried to think about how women felt. I asked the women staff members a lot of questions. At the time, after *Ghost* was completed, there were a lot of articles covering it. I asked a female editor, would you do something like that? What I found out was that women...women aren't indecisive about themselves. Becoming a different type of person, or diving off a cliff. Not knowing what's on the other side, but just doing it. I think men wouldn't be able to do it. And I think that a woman would. Women would take such actions first. I think men would follow after.

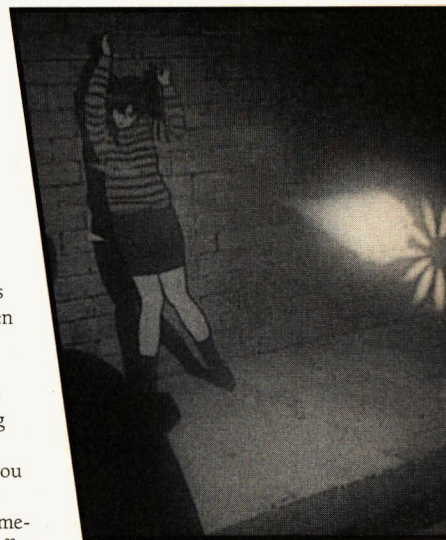
That's because women give birth. A complete person comes out of their own bodies. That's something that men cannot even imagine. Just thinking about your own body coming apart and forming a new person makes you go crazy. But that's how men are. They think that life starts and ends with their own life. But women feel a connection with life that comes from their own bodies. Men feel more separated. A man's life is just once. That's why they feel a certain way. They feel like they have to create—things like nations, or rockets, weapons. It's all the same, even novels. But women feel transformations, from girls to women to old women. And in that time, they create children and raise them. They live a completely different type of life.

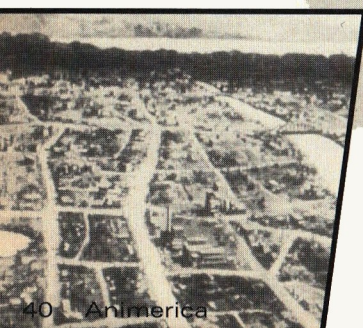
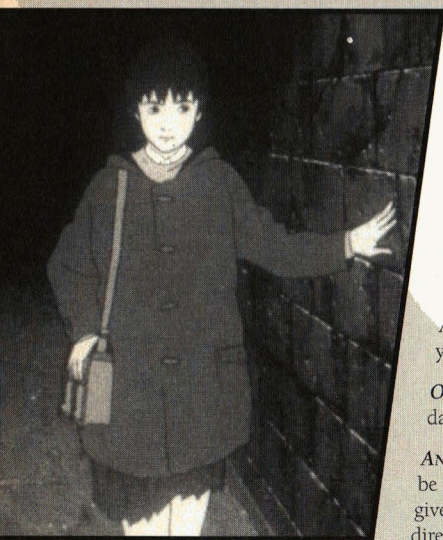
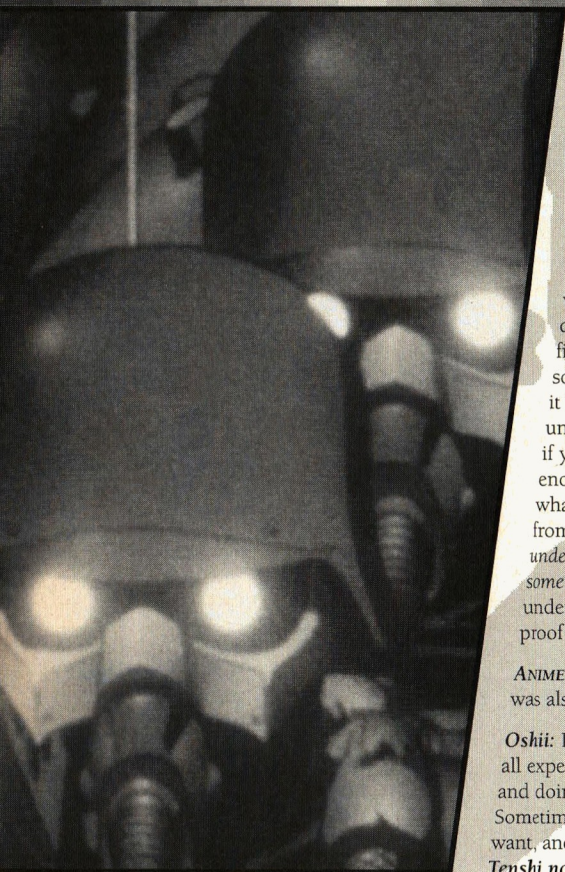
I don't think it's gender discrimination or anything like that. I think there is a slight difference in the type of lifeform they are. This may cause problems, but that's the way I really feel. The existence of men is an exception. They are unnecessary. Biologically speaking, they only function for sex. With fish or with anything, only when the females are in their mating periods are the males let into the group. That's the world of nature. Males are just a sudden mutation. Men just don't want to admit they are sudden mutations. That's why they make things so complicated. That's why men make things like war.

It may be true that men created civilization, but that is because they had nothing better to do. Those are the things I had in mind. Rather than portraying Motoko, I wanted to know what it meant to be reborn. What does it mean to become something you are not? I think that is something that men cannot understand. I wanted to portray it because it is something I cannot understand. To become a man is different.

I don't know why in the manga he/she becomes a man. I never asked Shirow, so I don't really know. I thought I would struggle through the understanding of it.

ANIMERICA: That's very deep, and many people feel that's what an Oshii movie is. Did you start making those kinds of films starting with *Beautiful Dreamer*?





Oshii: Yes. When I made my first movie, there was a certain understanding of what a director must be or do. And that would entail entertaining his audience, making an entertaining movie. Even if you do things in order to entertain the audience, I've come to understand that that doesn't necessarily make a movie.

I think about what makes a movie, what makes you feel like you saw a movie, what makes it more than just a big television screen. I believe that it is when the director does what he wants to. When he does something that nobody else can do. When the film necessitates that specific director—to show some kind of proof of that. If this is not done, then it is not a movie. The audience does not have to understand it. It might make the audience angry, but if you do your own thing, if you express yourself enough, even if the audience does not understand what you do, they can get some kind of enjoyment from it. That's was conclusion. You don't have to understand a movie, as long as it makes you feel something. At that point, I felt that I had a closer understanding of what makes a movie a movie. And proof of that was *Beautiful Dreamer*.

ANIMERICA: And *Tenshi no Tamago* ("Angel's Egg") was also an experimental...

Oshii: It was the same. And I don't consider them at all experimental. It's just doing what you want to do and doing what the conditions allow you to do. Sometimes you can accomplish 90% of what you want, and sometimes you can only do 50%. With *Tenshi no Tamago*, I was able to do 90% of what I wanted to. It was because the conditions allowed me to do so. In other words, at the time, nobody knew what should be made and how. So I was allowed to do whatever I wanted. I was approved to do whatever I wanted. There was no dialogue, but that was okay.

ANIMERICA: Do you often meet with the original creators of the manga you've adapted, such as *Urusei Yatsura's* Rumiko Takahashi?

Oshii: Yes, I do. Some directors feel it is better not to do so, but I feel that it is better to meet with them.

ANIMERICA: You often take up Christian themes in your work. Do you like those kinds of themes?

Oshii: Yes, I've liked the Bible ever since my student days. I still read it.

ANIMERICA: We are running out of time, so these will be my final two questions. What advice would you give to anyone who is thinking about becoming a director?

Oshii: Don't do it. [BOTH LAUGH] That's what I really think. It can be horrible. There are good things about it, but there are many bad aspects.

ANIMERICA: I was thinking of words of encouragement. [LAUGHS]

Oshii: If even then, you still want to do it, then you should do it. But basically, there is a lot of trouble being a director. Everyone thinks that directors make

movies the way they want to, but that's not the way it is at all. That's not reality at all. If a director wants to do something his own way, first of all he has to fight with the staff, he has to push them, and at times he has to trick his staff. He has to involve many people and convince them and trick them, and only then can he accomplish a small portion of what he wants to. You really need a lot of energy. If you think that you can immediately do something your own way, then you will most certainly fail.

ANIMERICA: So it's better not to do it.

Oshii: It's more fun just watching a movie. Most certainly.

ANIMERICA: For my last question, because several Oshii movies have been released in America, do you have a message for your fans here?

Oshii: Hmm...hmm...hmm...message? I think I am gradually getting closer to creating the kinds of movies I want to make. You can expect to see a linear progression. I am particularly fond of *Avalon*. But just because the director likes it doesn't mean the movie will be good. It's more normal for the opposite to be true. But *Avalon* will be a little different from my previous movies. It made me think that I am more comfortable [with directing]. Maybe it's because I'm older. Up until now, it was like I was using my movies to start fights with the world. But now, things seem different. [The movies] have more sentiment. They go smoother. That's how I feel. Although I suppose that you could say this film isn't any different from my others and that would be the end of it.

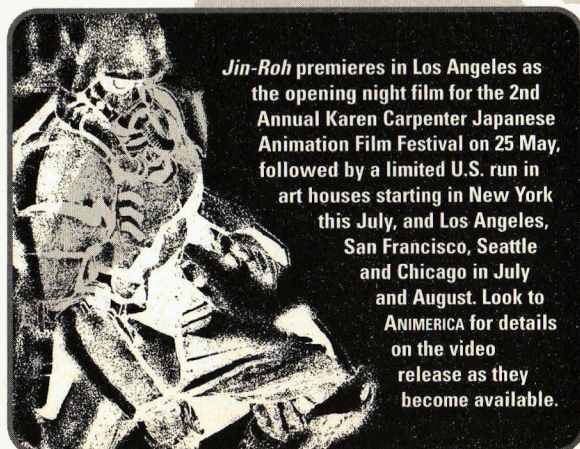
ANIMERICA: So this is a new Oshii movie.

Oshii: I wouldn't say new. Rather than new, you might say I'm exhausted. But it is certainly different. That I have become interested in women is a rather major change within myself. I think that for a while, I would like to use women as my main characters. I can't think of anything other than that.

ANIMERICA: We look forward to seeing that.

Oshii: Yes, it will be different from my previous portrayals of women.

ANIMERICA: Thank you very much. ★



Jin-Roh premieres in Los Angeles as the opening night film for the 2nd Annual Karen Carpenter Japanese Animation Film Festival on 25 May, followed by a limited U.S. run in art houses starting in New York this July, and Los Angeles, San Francisco, Seattle and Chicago in July and August. Look to ANIMERICA for details on the video release as they become available.

MAMORU OSHII ON AVALON

Mamoru Oshii's latest film as a director is not animation, but live-action—a cyber-suspense film entitled *Avalon*. But it's anime's continuing popularity that will bring this movie to U.S. audiences—Miramax Films has acquired the North American rights to release *Avalon*, and the company's press release referred to Oshii's anime work as his main claim to fame.

"Mr. Oshii has re-imagined the world once again after planting the seeds for all millennial cyber films (*Matrix*, etc.) with his revolutionary 1995 animated feature *Ghost in the Shell*," said Agnes Mentre, Miramax evp of acquisitions and co-productions, in the press release. She went on to describe *Avalon* as "a highly engaging film which carves stylistic new ground in the world of technology while simultaneously achieving a beautiful artistry. It is a great example of our focus on acquiring original material from bold, inventive directors." And at the very least, isn't it reassuring to know that Hollywood considers Oshii to be just that?

A near-future sci-fi tale, *Avalon*'s story deals with a familiar theme in the realm of science fiction and cyber-punk—the vanishingly thin dividing line between fantasy and reality. The main character is a beautiful woman whose matchless skill in a computer-simulated battle/fantasy game is not enough to keep her having doubts about the dystopian world in which she lives. Her skills and her feelings are both put to the test when she decides to enter the game to retrieve a former lover, whose mind is "lost" in the game, at a secret level from which no player has ever returned.

Avalon is not just a departure from animation for Oshii, but a departure from his own language as well. Shot entirely on location in Poland, *Avalon*'s dialogue was also recorded only in Polish.

"I've always wanted to do something like that," Oshii told us. "I originally wanted to do *Tenshi no Tamago* in Polish. But I wasn't allowed to do it.... I've somehow always liked the way Polish sounds."

In our interview, conducted when *Avalon* was in its sound-production stage in San Francisco, Oshii could give only the barest details of the film's plot. But he did provide some fascinating insights into his own reasons for making films.

But which does he prefer: live-action or anime? When asked, Oshii answered, "I am not sure. After working on *Avalon*, I am even more unsure. Doing *Avalon*, I felt that I was better at doing animation. But when I work on animation I would rather be doing live-action."

ANIMERICA: Could you tell us something about the plot of *Avalon*?

Oshii: It's a story about a computer game.

ANIMERICA: Making a computer game, getting addicted to a computer game?

Oshii: Hmm, what should I say? Well, it's the story of a computer game player.

ANIMERICA: A boy?

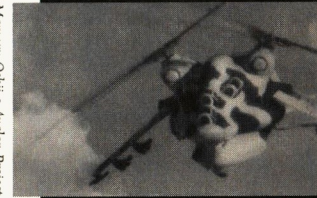
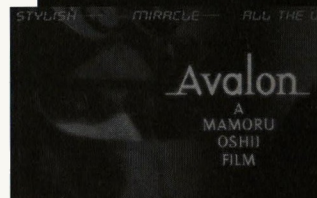
Oshii: No, a woman. Again, the main character is a woman. Once I'd started making the main character a woman, it was difficult to make one with a male main character. In the draft for the film, the main character was a man, but somehow, the image wasn't right. You know when you try to picture which actor would be good for the role? For example, you think, no, not Clint Eastwood...not Keanu Reeves...not Brad Pitt.... And for some reason I couldn't come up with even one Japanese actor.

ANIMERICA: Do you prefer American movies, or foreign movies to Japanese movies?

Oshii: I no longer see Japanese movies, so I've lost interest. But I've also lost interest in American movies. I've lost interest in movies that most people like. But they come up on television so often that I know their faces and names. Even I know Brad Pitt. But I couldn't think of anybody for the main character. I asked myself why. Then, when I thought of the main character as a woman, I became really motivated. Maybe it's because of my age too. I've become interested in women. I never was before.

ANIMERICA: Is it set in the present?

Oshii: Not the present, but.... With movies, no matter what time period you try to depict, it all becomes like the present. That's how I've always felt. So past or future, it doesn't really matter. The near future is easiest to portray, so that is what I've always done. Depicting a thousand years in the future or a hundred years in the future is a lot of work. For the most part, I've never seen a high-quality production set in such a time period. For the near future, ten or twenty years from now, you only have to change things a little bit. It's the most convenient, but I've always done the present—*Patlabor* was that way, and *Ghost* was...*Ghost* was set in the future but it dealt with issues of the present. So I've done the same thing this time. This time in particular, I think that it should appear that it doesn't matter whether it is the past, the present, or the future. That's how I intended to make it.



All images for Avalon © 2001 Mamoru Oshii • Avalon Project

ANIMERICA INTERVIEW

MAMORU OSHII

ANIMERICA: And the title?

Oshii: "Avalon" is a term from the King Arthur legend. Arthur gets wounded, and is dying. The Goddess of the country appears, and delivers him to Avalon. Avalon is the island where King Arthur rests, where the spirits of heroes rest.

ANIMERICA: And why specifically did you use Avalon? Does someone go to Avalon? Or is it the name of the game? Or...?

Oshii: You'll find out immediately when you see the movie. But it is the name of the game.

ANIMERICA: Is it the best movie that you've made so far?

Oshii: Yes, among the live-action movies, I think it is. I'm satisfied with it.

ANIMERICA: Is it a heavy movie?

Oshii: Hmmm.... No, not heavy, for one of my films, it is rather odd.

ANIMERICA: Not rough?

Oshii: No, not rough. Well, okay, it is rough, but it is more to be seen with feeling. Or rather, maybe it's because the main character is a woman, but it is an emotional movie. It has more sentiment. I think it is a sentimental movie.

ANIMERICA: What would you like viewers to look for when the movie is released?

Oshii: I suppose, people will first notice the digital work.

ANIMERICA: It has a lot of computer graphics?

Oshii: There are a lot of computer graphics, and its full of digital work. Most of it is done digitally. I think that will stand out in the film. But that's really not what I want people to look for.

Hmmm. I think that I've created a very attractive character. One of my best character portrayals so far. That's what I want people to see. ★

For more about Avalon, go to
<http://www.avalon-net.com> (Japanese only)

MAMORU OSHII SELECT FILMOGRAPHY

A selection of works in anime and live-action film

IPPATSU KANTA-KUN

("One-Hit Kanta")

TV series (1977-78), Supervising episode director

KAGAKU NINJA-TAI GATCHAMAN II

("Science Ninja Team Gatchaman II")

TV series (1978-79), Supervising episode director

ZENDAMAN

TV series (1979-80), Supervising episode director

NILS NO FUSHIGI NA TABI

("The Wonderful Adventures of Nils")

TV series (1980-81),

Supervising episode director

RYŪ NO ME NO NAMIDA

("Tears of a Dragon's Eye")

Educational film (1982), Director

FULL MOON DENSETSU INDRA

("Full Moon Legend Indra")

Unreleased pilot (1980),

Creator, planning, director

URUSEI YATSURA

("Those Obnoxious Aliens")

TV series (1981-86), Chief director,

episode director, storyboards

URUSEI YATSURA: ONLY YOU

Movie (1983), Director,

screen adaptation, storyboards

URUSEI YATSURA 2:

BEAUTIFUL DREAMER

Movie (1984), Director, screenplay

DALLOS I:

REMEMBER BARTHOLOMEW

OAV (1983), Director (with Hisayuki Toriumi)

TENSHI NO TAMAGO

("Angel's Egg")

OAV (1985), Director, original story, script

TWILIGHT Q (2)/

MEIKYŪ BUKKEN FILE 538

("Twilight Q 2: Labyrinth Objects File 538")

OAV (1987), Director, screenplay

ZILLION

TV series (1987), Storyboards

KIDŌ KEISATSU PATLABOR

("Mobile Police Patlabor")

OAV series (1988-89),

Director, storyboards

KIDŌ KEISATSU PATLABOR:

THE MOVIE

("Mobile Police Patlabor: The Movie")

Movie (1989), Director

KIDŌ KEISATSU PATLABOR

("Mobile Police Patlabor")

TV series (1988-89), Screenplay

GOSENZO-SAMA BAN-BANZAI!

("Let's Really Hear it For the Ancestors!")

OAV series (1989-90), Director, screenplay

MAROKO

Movie (1990), Creator, director, screenplay

SHIN KIDŌ KEISATSU PATLABOR

("New Mobile Police Patlabor")

OAV series (1990-91), Screenplay

TALKING HEAD

Movie (1992), Director, screenplay

KIDŌ KEISATSU PATLABOR:

THE MOVIE 2

("Mobile Police Patlabor: The Movie 2")

Movie (1993), Director

KŌKAKU KIDŌ-TAI

("Ghost in the Shell")

Movie (1995), Director

UCHŪ KAMOTSUSEN REMNANT 6

("Space Freighter Remnant 6")

Live-action film (1996), Co-Producer

G.R.M. PAIROTTO ANIME-SYON

("G.R.M. Pilot Animation")

Unreleased demo film (1996), Director

G.R.M. JISSYAHAN PAIROTTO

("G.R.M. Live Action Edition Pilot")

Unreleased demo film (1998), Director

PATLABOR THE LIVE ACTION MOVIE

("Patlabor The Live Action Movie")

Unreleased demo film (1998), Director

JIN-ROH

("Man-Wolf")

Movie (2000), Creator, screenplay

BLOOD THE LAST VAMPIRE

Movie (2000), Planning assistance

AVALON

Movie (2001), Director

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STRIKER

SHERLOCK
HOUND

Cinema mini-features 1984 and 1986;
26-part TV series 1984-85;
U.S. video from Celebrity Home
Entertainment.



(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 19)

A Japanese-Italian coproduction between TMS and the Italian station RAI, *Meitantei Holmes* ("Famous Detective Holmes")—known as *Sherlock Hound* in the U.S., *The Amazing Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* on British video, and *Il fiuto di Sherlock Holmes* ("Sherlock Holmes' Intuition") in Italy—united two major animation figures. Hayao Miyazaki directed six episodes, writing some of them, and the show was conceived by Italian art director Marco Pagot, creator of such acclaimed domestic series as *Adamo e l'acqua* ("Adam and the Water," 1977) and *L'ispettore Nasy* ("Inspector Nasy," 1980-82). Miyazaki paid homage to his Italian colleague by naming his later aviation hero Captain Marco Pagot (a.k.a. Porco Rosso). *Holmes's* canine character designs were by the late Yoshifumi Kondo.

Unfortunately, a copyright dispute with the estate of Sherlock Holmes' creator Sir Arthur Conan Doyle nearly killed the show. The series was put on hold and the Miyazaki episodes shelved. Curiously, it was another Miyazaki production that saved *Holmes*. When *Nausicaä* was released in 1984, the Japanese company Tokuma released two of Miyazaki's *Holmes* episodes—"Blue Carbuncle" and "Treasure Under the Sea"—as supporting features. The character names were changed to avoid copyright. The positive reception, coupled with the end of the dispute, persuaded animation production studio Tokyo Movie Shinsha (TMS) to finish the series with a new staff. Two more Miyazaki episodes—"The Kidnapping of Mrs. Hudson" and "White Cliffs of Dover"—supported *Laputa: Castle in the Sky* in Japanese theaters in 1986.

Holmes purists beware. This madcap series not only turns Sherlock into a dog but places him in an anachronistic anime world of airships, battleships, submarines, steam-driven trams, and other contraptions—all of which figure in the manic chases and battles that dominate the show.

The brightly colored (but not garish) series revolves round Hound's running battles with Professor Moriarty, demoted from the Napoleon of crime to a pantomime buffoon. Moriarty is "helped" by two doleful but very funny assistants resigned to things going horribly wrong each week. Along with the befuddled but loyal Watson, Hound is aided by the stuffy Inspector Lestrade and the delectable Mrs. Hudson, a sweet but strong Miyazaki heroine who's equally able fighting criminals or spring-cleaning their hideouts. (Even Moriarty is smitten by her.) Many of Hound's victories depend more on coincidence than detecting, but it hardly matters in context.

The series has plenty of in-jokes for Holmesians. Some stories use fragments of original Sherlock Holmes plots. For exam-

ple, the episode "The Little Client" echoes Conan Doyle's "The Engineer's Thumb."

"The Speckled Band" (not a Miyazaki episode) is a less scary reworking of the original Holmes story of the same name. "Blue Carbuncle" starts with a great gag as a pterodactyl swoops on London (à la the climax of Conan Doyle's novel *The Lost World*), only to be revealed as a wacky plane with Moriarty's goons squawking through a microphone! The "Blue Carbuncle" episode also has terrific land and air chases. One set-piece, involving Moriarty on a giant steam-tram, resembles the rollercoaster train chase in *Laputa*.

"Carbuncle" is perhaps the best of the six Miyazaki-directed stories. Of the others, "The Little Client" involves a giant counterfeiting machine that spectacularly blows its top (twice!). "The Gold Sovereigns" is set in a *Laputa*-style industrial town, while "Treasure Under the Sea," with its submarines and giant battleships, anticipates Miyazaki's war-adventure strips for *MODEL GRAPHIX*, themselves the source for *Porco Rosso*. The other Miyazaki tales put Mrs. Hudson center-stage. After her abduction in "The Kidnapping of Mrs. Hudson," she saves the day in "The White Cliffs of Dover," a story full of airplane action and more manic car chases.

Twenty more *Meitantei Holmes* TV episodes, not involving Miyazaki, were made. Judging by the selection available on video, they're a notch down from their predecessors in terms of action and story. Still, all the episodes feature colorful, attractive designs and scenery and fairly smooth movement. As for the English dub, *Holmes* has one of the best around, with natural-sounding actors the right side of stereotype. (The main voices are credited to Larry Moss, Lewis Arquette, Pat Parris, and Hamilton Camp). The unobtrusive music by Kentaro Haneda (*Macross: Do You Remember Love?*, *Barefoot Gen*) is another plus, placid and dynamic by turns. Overall, *Holmes* is lightweight but very likable.

In America, *Sherlock Hound* appeared on video under the Celebrity Home Entertainment label around 1989. Confusingly, there were two distinct video series. One was a line of low-quality extended-play tapes for consumers; the other consisted of high-quality short-play tapes for rental stores. To add to the confusion, some tapes from the different series had the same box titles.

A last complication: "Blue Carbuncle" and "Treasure Under the Sea" each exist in different Japanese versions for cinema and TV. The animation is the same, but music, voice-actors, and character names are different. The theatrical version of the episodes will be released on Japanese DVD this May, and a box set of the full TV series should be out as you read this.



26-part TV series, 1978;
two film compilations,
1979 and 1984; not yet
available on U.S. video.

FUTURE BOY CONAN

Here's a trivia question: What was the first anime series shown on Japan's public TV channel NHK? The answer is this 26-part adventure serial from Hayao Miyazaki, one of the first anime he directed. *Mirai Shōnen Conan* ("Future Boy Conan") was made by Nippon Animation, which made innumerable World Masterpiece Theatre series, such as *Heidi*, and is loosely based on Alexander Key's book *The Incredible Tide*. As well as directing, Miyazaki was credited with scene, character and mechanical designs, plus storyboarding. Isao Takahata assisted with storyboarding and directed parts 9 and 10. The series was so popular that NHK repeated the whole saga in 1980. There were two cinema compilations (1979 and 1984) although Miyazaki approved neither. More than any of his better-known works, *Conan* established the core themes that define the maestro's later output.

The serial is set after the 2008 World War, when magnetic weapons cause the continents to sink beneath the sea. The opening sequence, repeated at the start of each episode, shows humans fleeing in a spaceship. It feels like the beginning of *Titan A.E.*... only in this version, the spaceship plunges to a remote island and all seems lost. But then, miraculously, nature starts to regenerate before the survivors' eyes. The moral is the same as in *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind*—humans may destroy themselves, but life will always go on.

Our hero, Conan, is the child of the island survivors. He's a young but fantastically tough lad, with almost superhuman strength. (His strength is never explained, leaving us wondering if he's related to Pippi Longstocking.) As the story opens, most of the islanders have died, and Conan and his nominal "grandfather" have lived alone for years. The tranquility of Conan's life is disturbed when the sea washes up a girl his own age. Her name is Lana, and she's fleeing a high-tech, totalitarian city called Industria. Before long the Industrians arrive (Conan's guardian dies fighting them) and capture Lana. Conan sets out to save her, beginning his adventures.

Conan's story is meticulously told. Almost every scene builds plot and character details, and the pace is wonderfully controlled. There was no attempt to base each episode on the same model. Some episodes are fast, some slow, some action-packed, some with almost no action at all. The drawing is simple but consistent, and the characters show far more emotion than many later anime heroes. The backgrounds are usually static but often beautiful, especially those showing nature's return. The series gives the pleasure of an illustrated storybook. Viewers can immerse themselves in the plot without the distraction of live actors or real locations.

The tale takes Conan to the futuristic Industria (plenty of opportunity for *Flash Gordon*-style cliffhangers) and from there to Lana's idyllic home, which he defends from its would-be conquerors. Although the action is sometimes repetitive (the children spend a lot of time locked up, running through passages or swimming underwater), there's always a sense of the story going somewhere new. By the last episodes, Conan must deal with tidal waves, earthquakes destroying Industria, and a war plane threatening the planet.

Supporting characters include the comically flamboyant Captain Dyce and Conan's stumpy buddy Jimsy—the latter a splendidly gauche, lovable creation, deserving his own series. Then there are the action set pieces, carefully constructed and very exciting, with the energy and anarchism of *Lupin III* and *Holmes*. The first episode alone has numerous clever details. When Conan battles a killer shark, he dives from an overgrown metal structure; you look twice before recognizing the remains of a battleship. The duel itself takes place in a sunken city, with Conan ducking into submerged cars and buildings to dodge the predator.

It's impossible not to be struck by the parallels with Miyazaki's other work. Conan and Lana are clear ancestors of *Laputa: Castle in the Sky*'s Pazu and Sheeta, right down to the dangerous secret—in this case, solar power—which Lana must protect. The children aren't just *Laputa* clones, however. Conan is endearingly klutzy and unrefined, while Lana is visibly more grown-up, acting as big sister. Monsley, the ruthless villainess who proves to have a human heart, is comparable to Princess Kushana in *Nausicaä* and Lady Eboshi in *Princess Mononoke*. Monsley's invasion of Lana's homeland also parallels the *Nausicaä* film.

Then there's the array of flying machines, from seaplanes to the monstrous war behemoth that appears at the climax.... Well, Miyazaki fans should get the idea. Taken on its own merits, or compared with later triumphs, *Conan* is one of the best anime series out there.

Last year saw perhaps the biggest-ever anime poll. The Japanese subscription channel Animax, the men's lifestyle magazine *BRUTUS* and the video rental chain Tsutaya polled nearly 200,000 people to find the "Top 100" Japanese animation titles. It's a measure of *Conan*'s impact that the 20-year-old series was Number 21. (For comparison, the multimedia franchise *Pokémon* was No. 28 and *Akira* was No. 45.)

To date, *Conan* is not available on U.S. video, although it's been released on Japanese video and DVD. In 1999, Nippon broadcast a "pseudo-sequel" serial called *Mirai Shōnen Conan 2*, which has no true connection to Miyazaki's original. ★



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story thus far :
read before
boarding, please

galaxy express 999



tetsuro

"I'm scared," confesses a shaken Claire to Tetsuro. *"Me, too,"* Tetsuro admits. *"But I won't give up! There's something here that I must do...there's a reason that I was born, and I won't rest until I know!"*



maetel

"Yamato has put out its sailing lights," observes Maetel, *"passing Three-Nine without giving one signal. They must be preparing for a real emergency!"* Compared to the destruction of Manmutos Utopia, Maetel continues, the subsequent "dark explosion" was *"much larger than the death of our tiny solar system...a few million times larger. This was an experiment in destruction."*



conductor

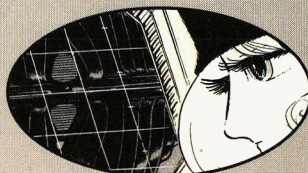
"This worries me," frets a nervous Shachô-san or "Conductor," observing the silent passing of the looks-exactly-the-same-on-the-outside-but-is-completely-revamped-on-the-inside Space Battleship *Yamato*. *"It's just passed us by,"* agrees Maetel, *"at topmost speed and prepared for battle!"*



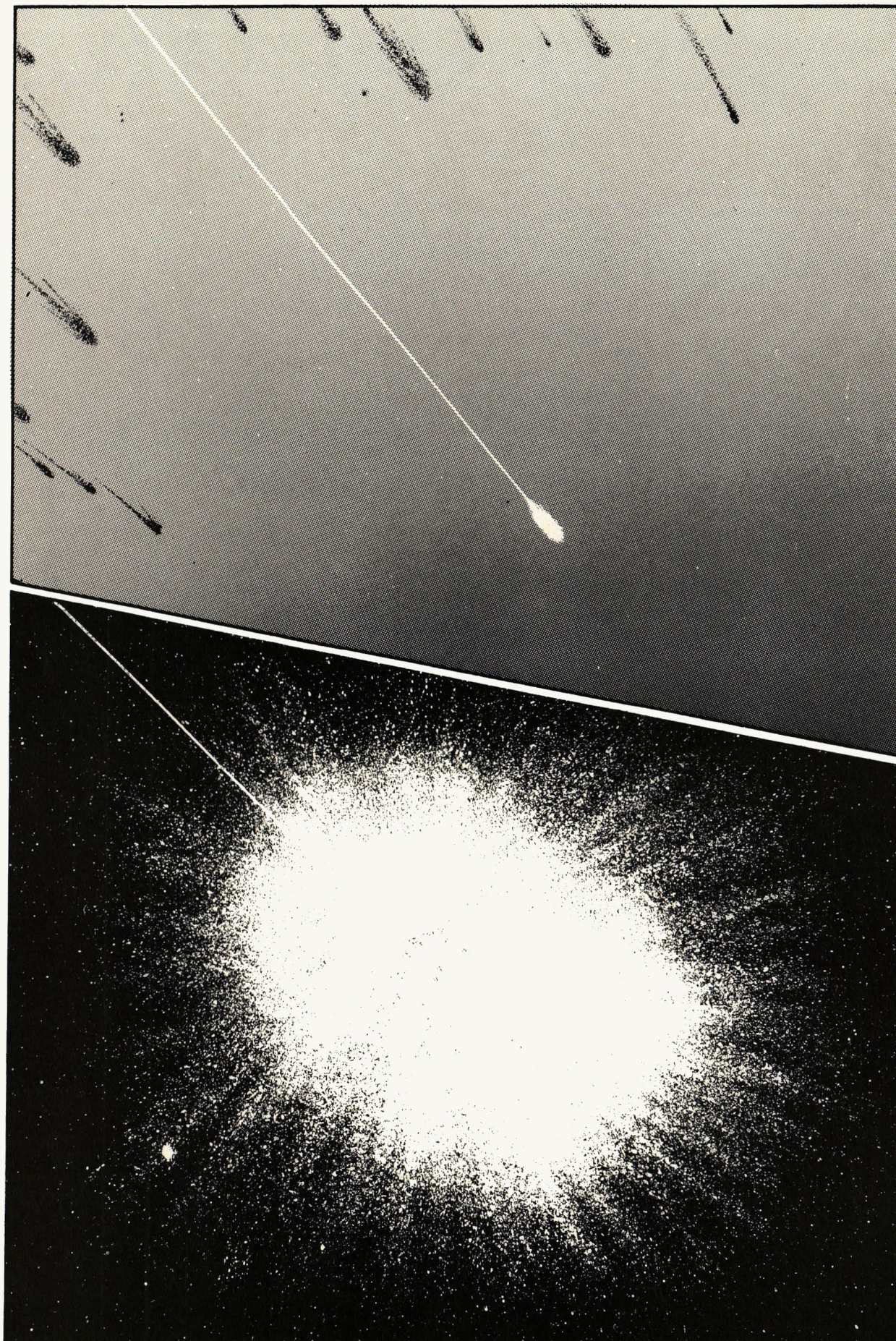
kanon

"I am Kanon," states the eldritch electrical faerie, simply. *"I am completely synchronized to Three-Nine.... Maetel, Tetsuro, Claire, Mr. Conductor—I will go anywhere you need me!"*

Next time:



dark energy?



The Hunt For The Past Begins Now

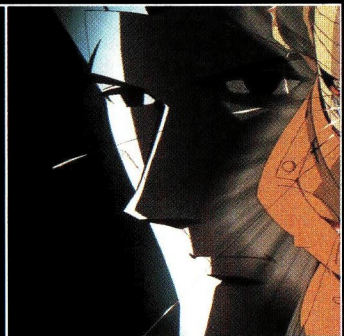
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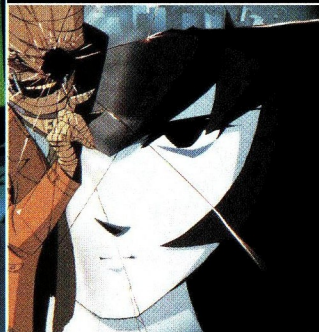
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Roger Smith
Paradigm
City's
Most Trusted
Negotiator



Dorothy
An
Intelligent
And Often
Cold Android



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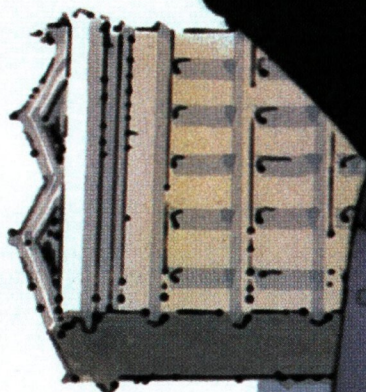
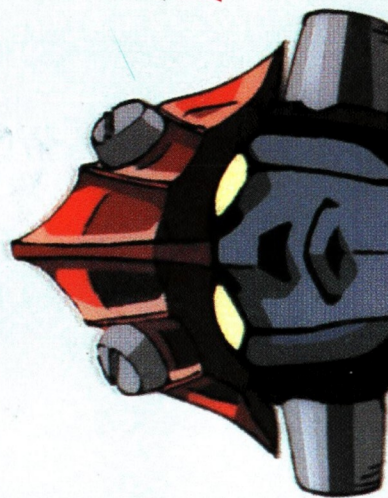
sam goody

**Leading the
Digital Revolution**

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THE BIG





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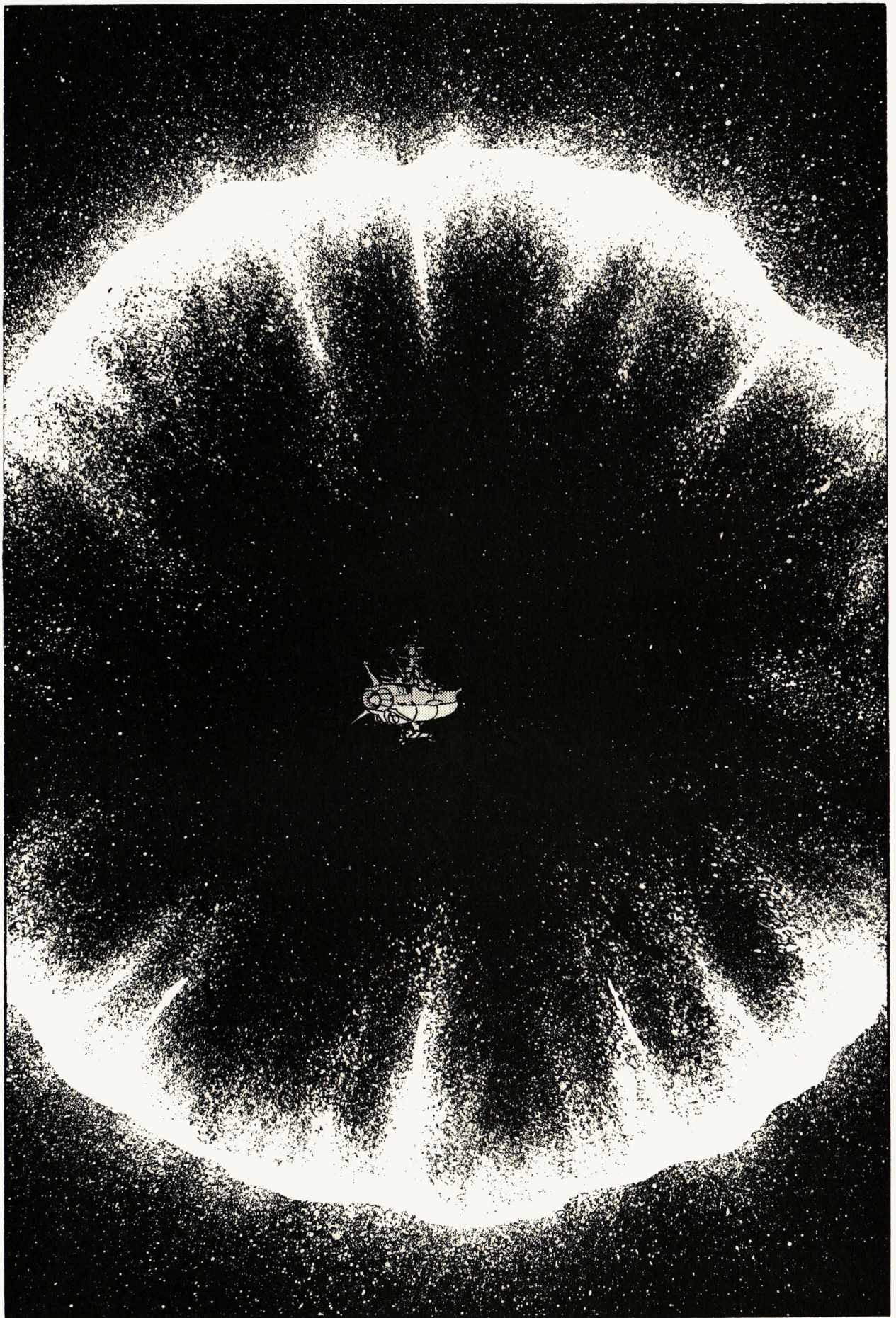
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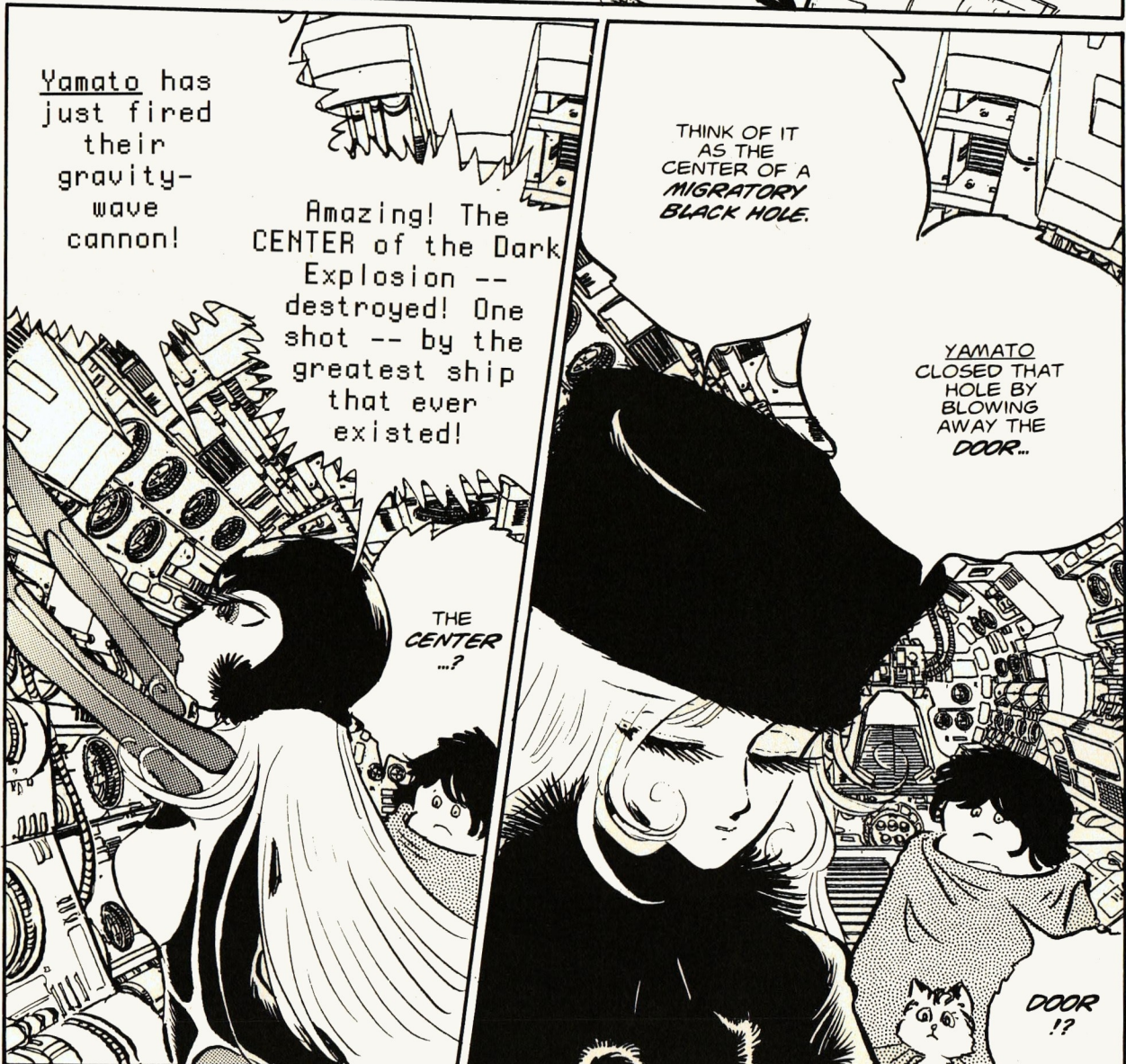
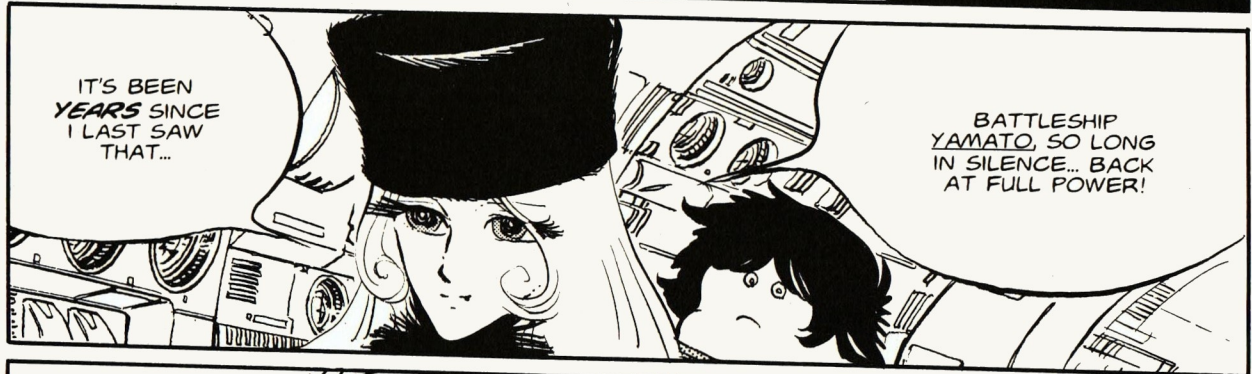
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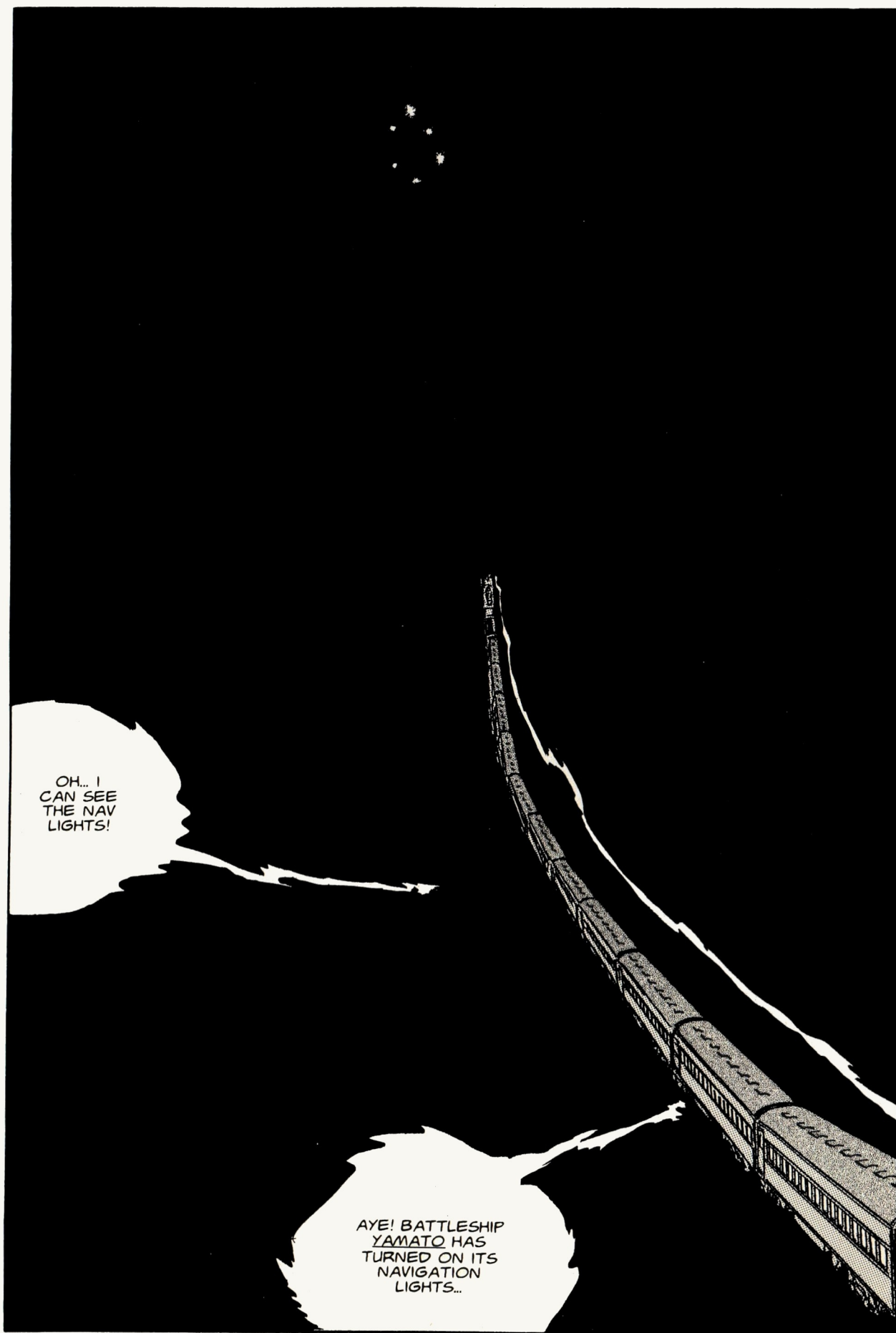


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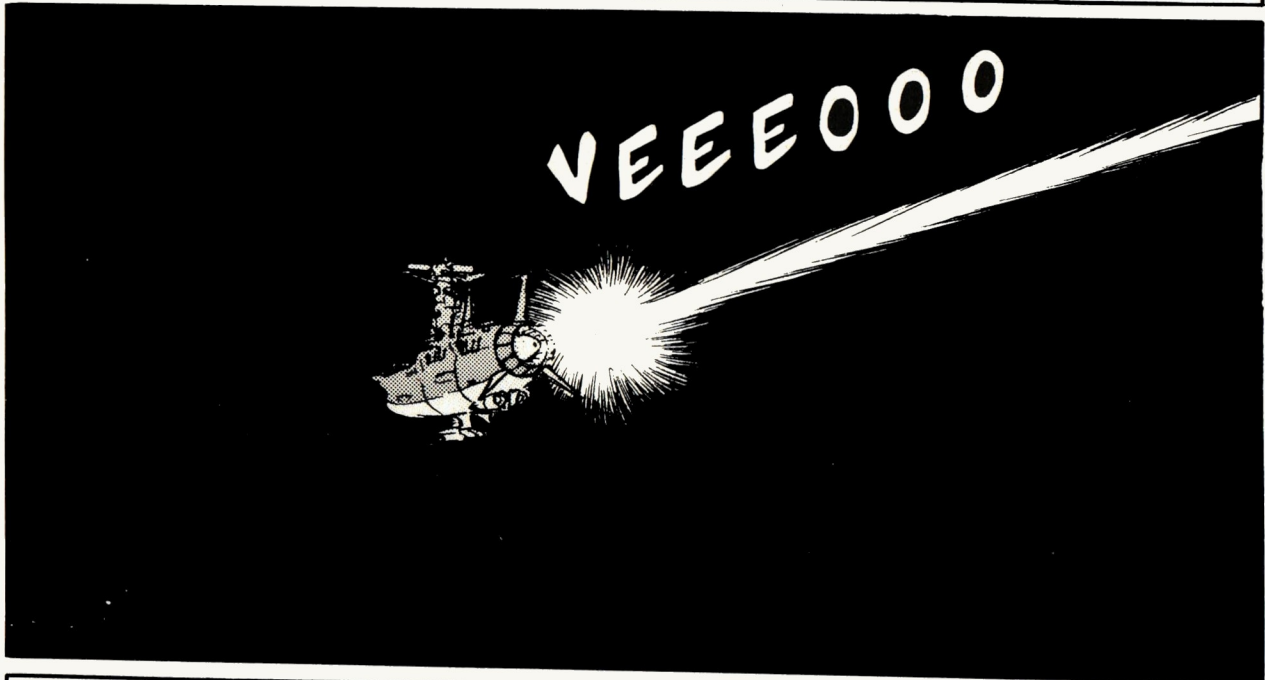
OH... I
CAN SEE
THE NAV
LIGHTS!

AYE! BATTLESHIP
YAMATO HAS
TURNED ON ITS
NAVIGATION
LIGHTS...



THEN... WE'RE
SAFE FOR A
WHILE?

YES... FOR
NOW...

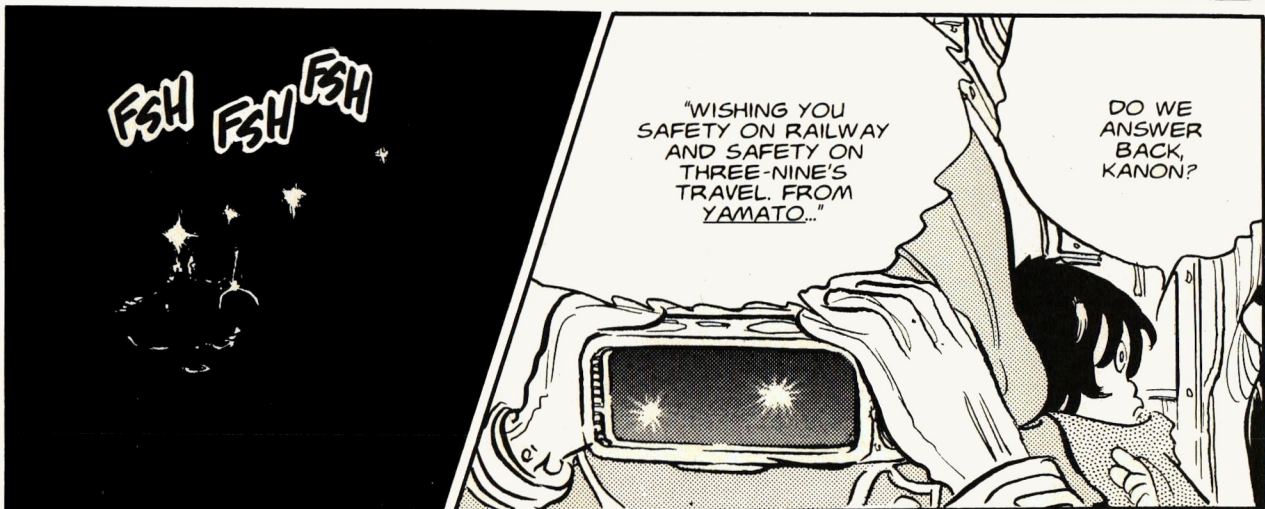


VEEEE000



YAMATO
IS
LEAVING!

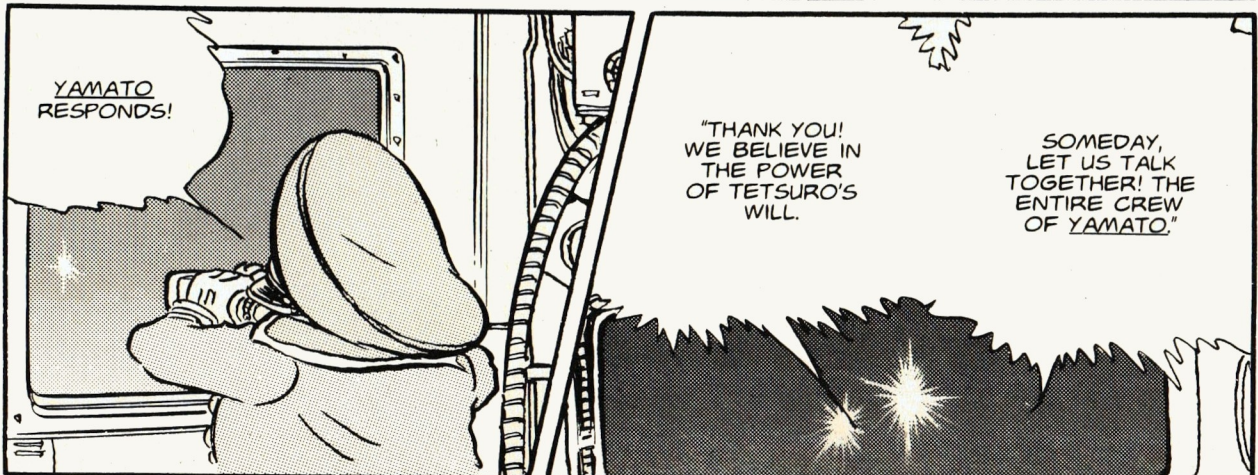
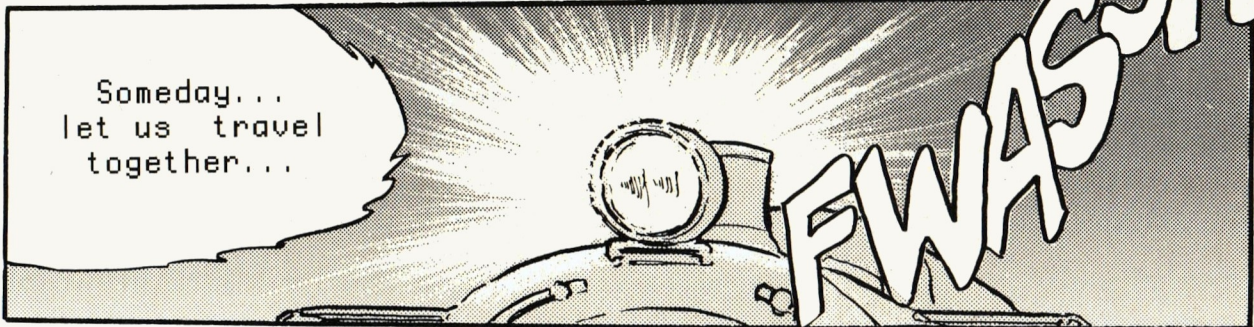
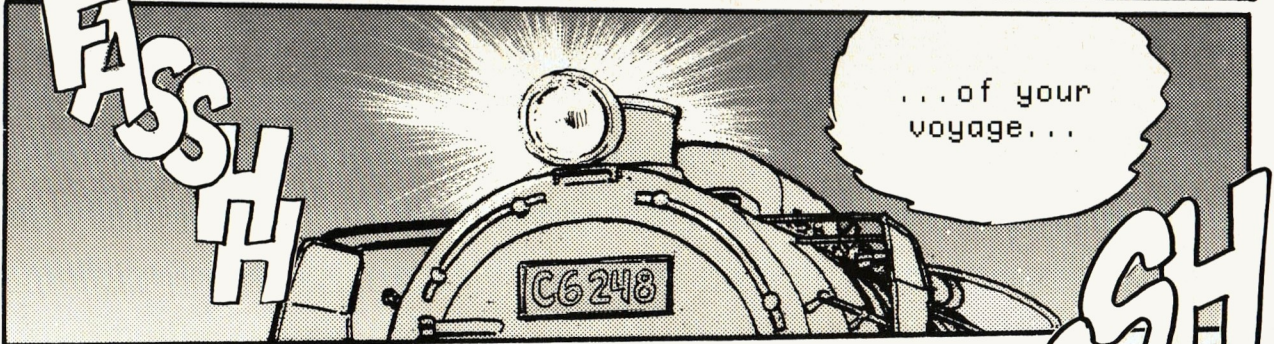
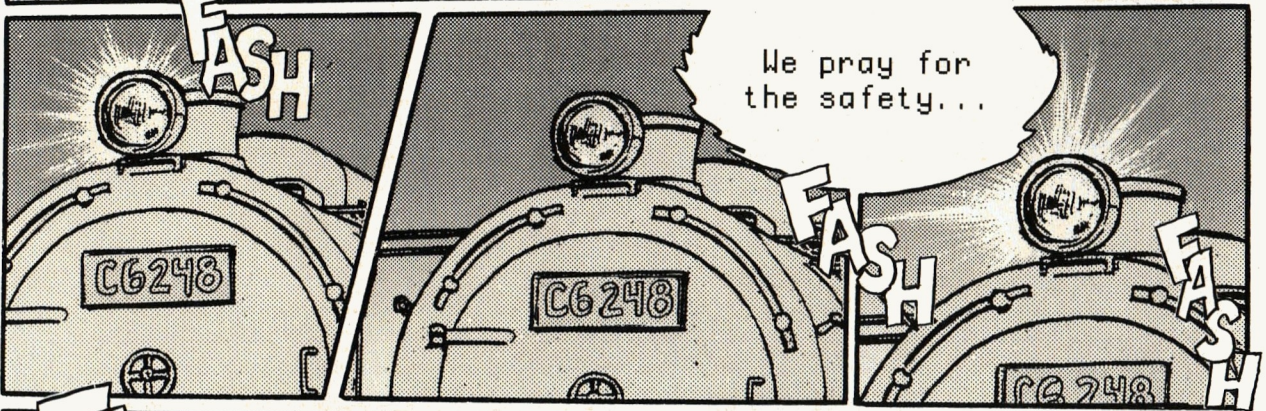
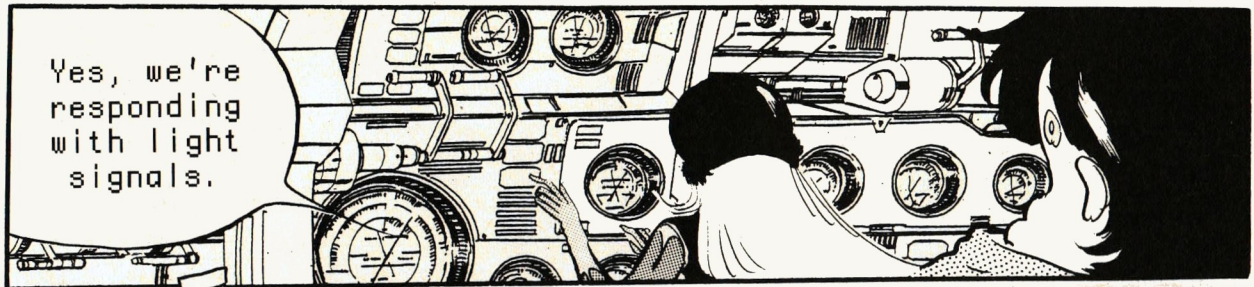
THEY'VE
SENT AN
IGNITION
SIGNAL!

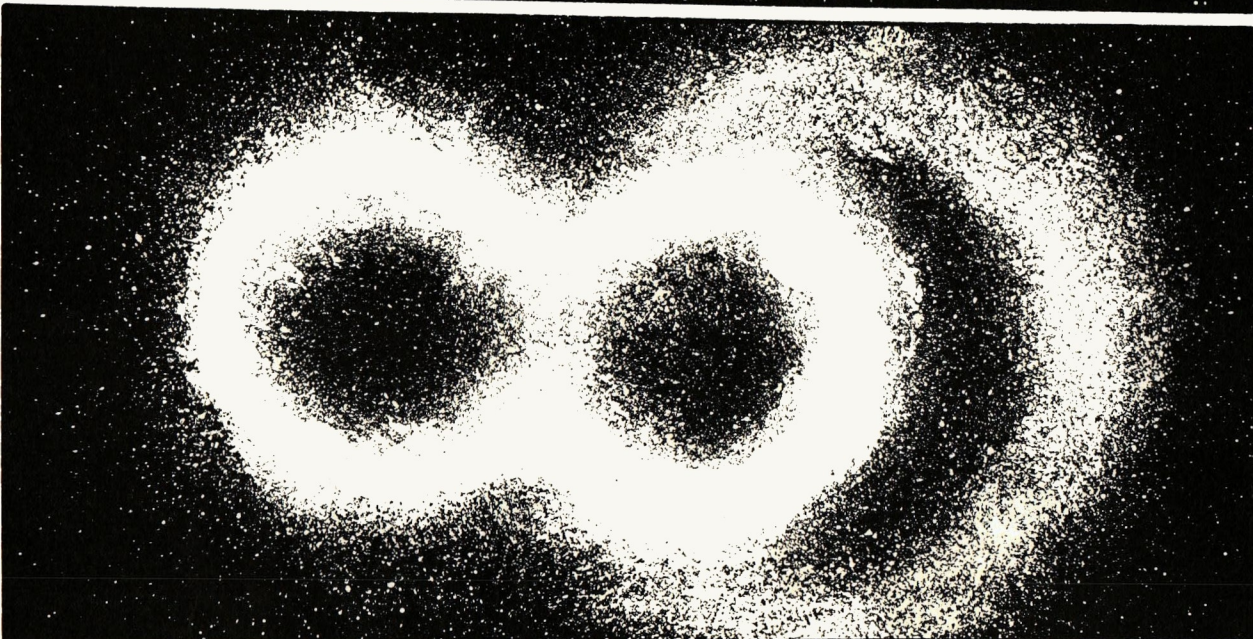
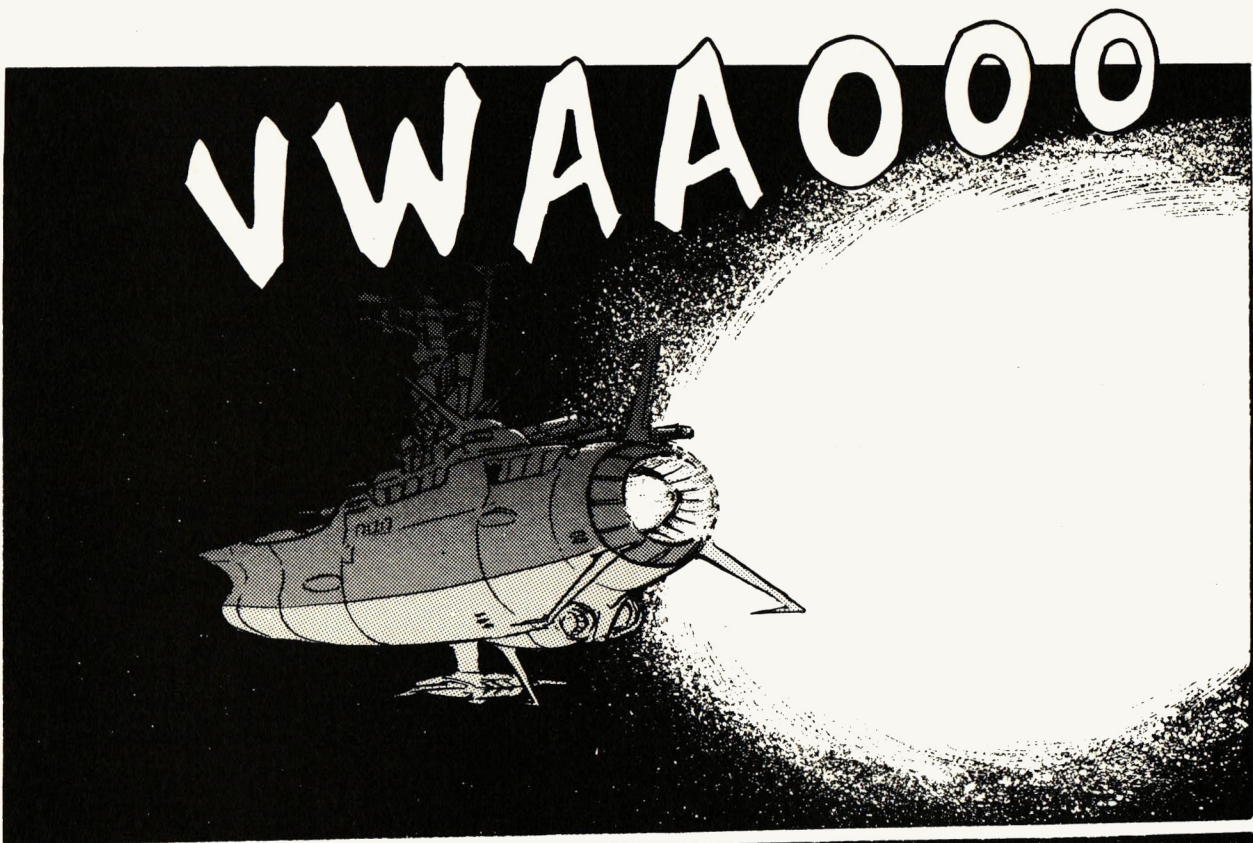


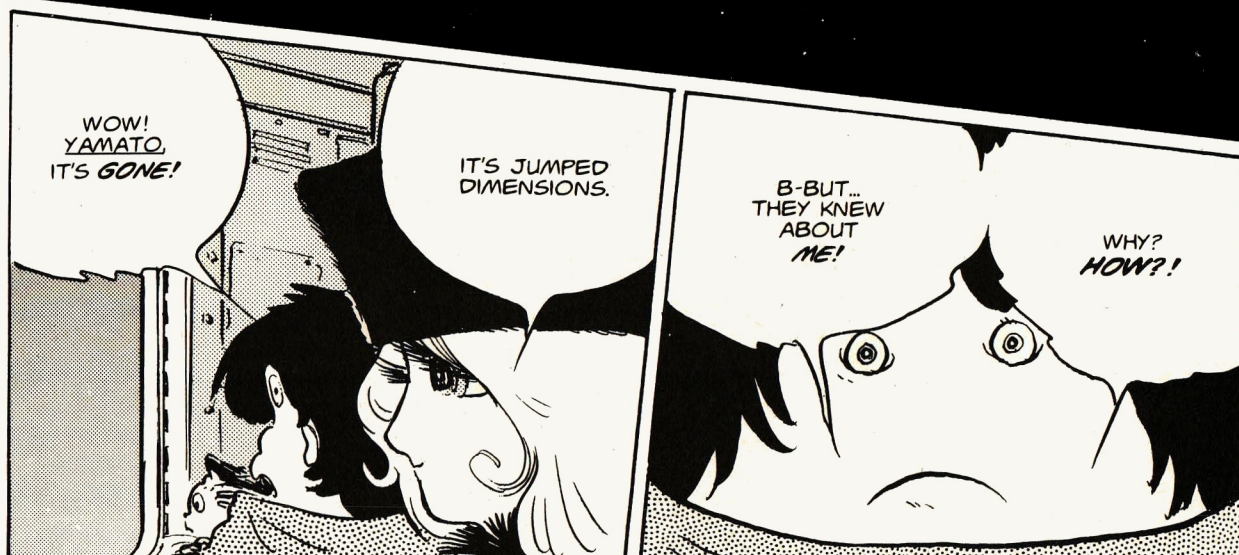
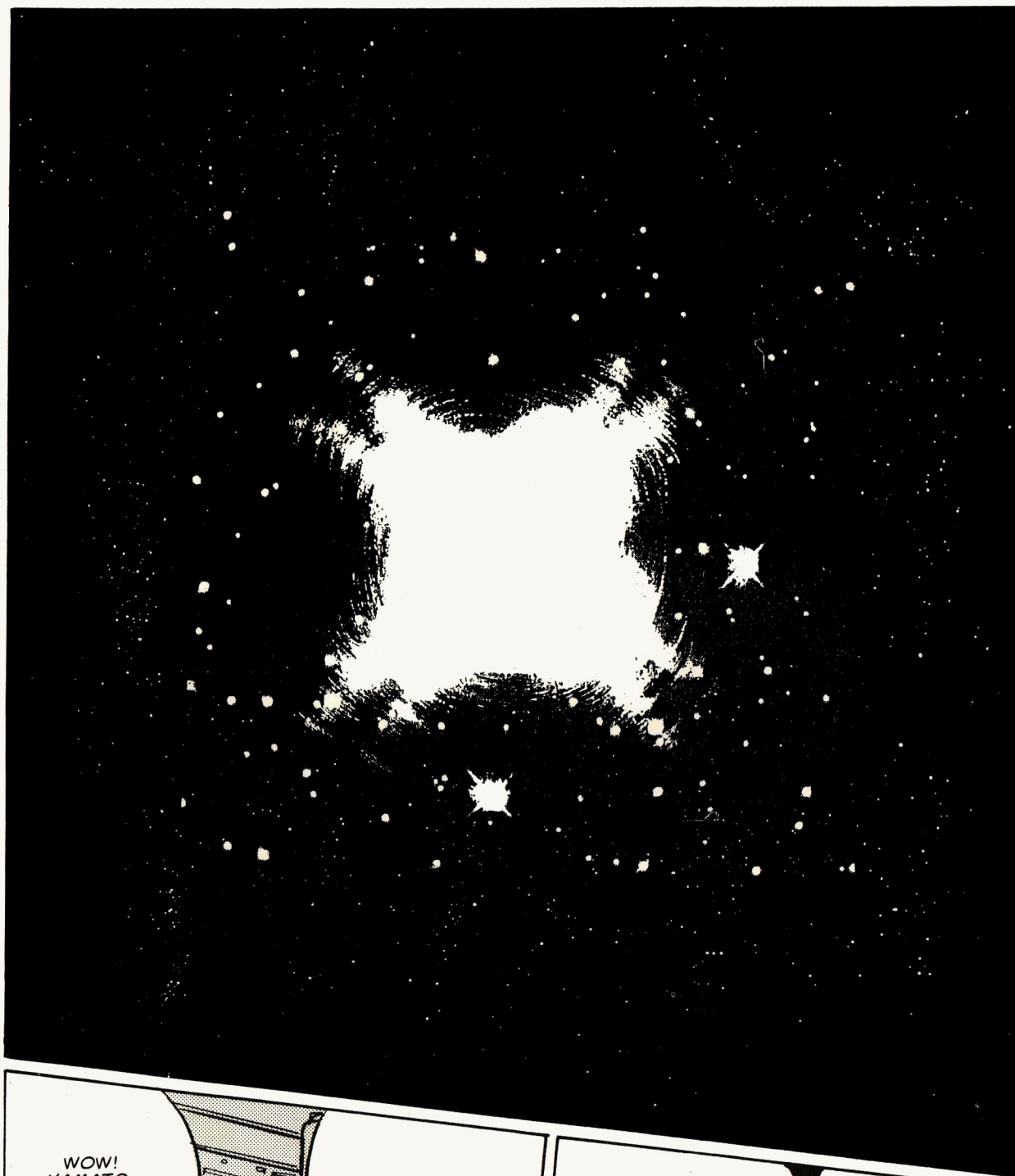
FSH FSH FSH

"WISHING YOU
SAFETY ON RAILWAY
AND SAFETY ON
THREE-NINE'S
TRAVEL. FROM
YAMATO..."

DO WE
ANSWER
BACK,
KANON?









IN THIS UNIVERSE,
THE POWER OF
WILL IS ALL THAT
ENABLES BEINGS
TO ENCOUNTER
ONE ANOTHER!

WHEN YOU RUN
PAST LIGHT AND
TIME, THERE ARE
ENCOUNTERS THAT
ARE MADE *BEYOND*
THE TIME-SPACE
CONTINUUM... IN THE
INNER UNIVERSE!



THE
INNER
UNIVERSE...!?



YES. THAT IS
HERE, IN
OUR SEA OF
STARS...

YAMATO
CLOSED THE
DOOR THAT
WAS OPENED
TO THE
OUTSIDE...



BUT... SOMEONE -
SOMETHING -
TRIED TO WRENCH
IT OPEN...

THERE IS A
BEING WHO
IS *OPENING*
THAT *DOOR*...

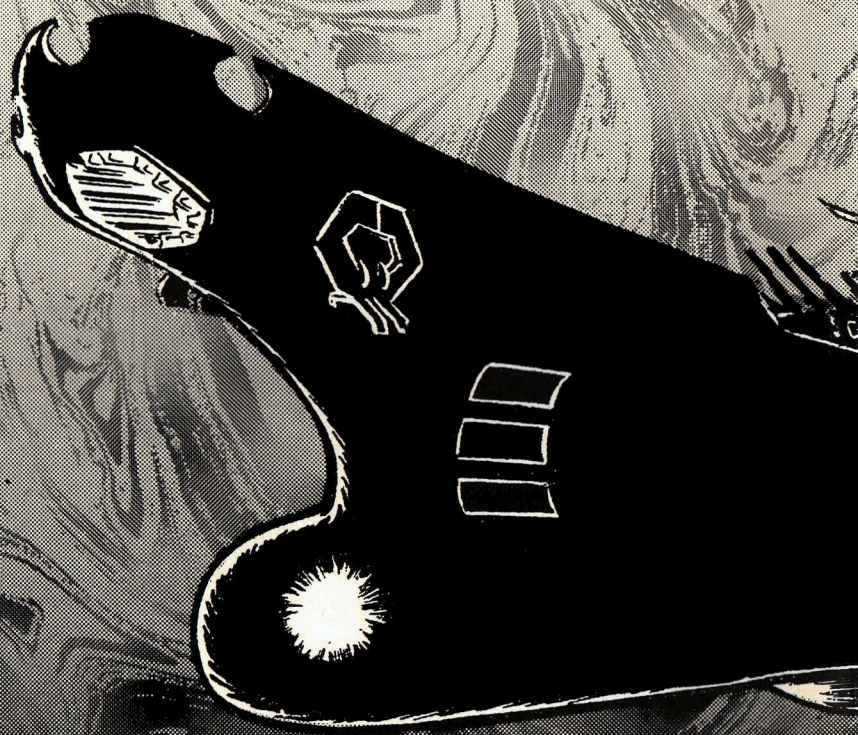


I'M GETTING
CONFUSED...
WHERE DID
YAMATO GO?

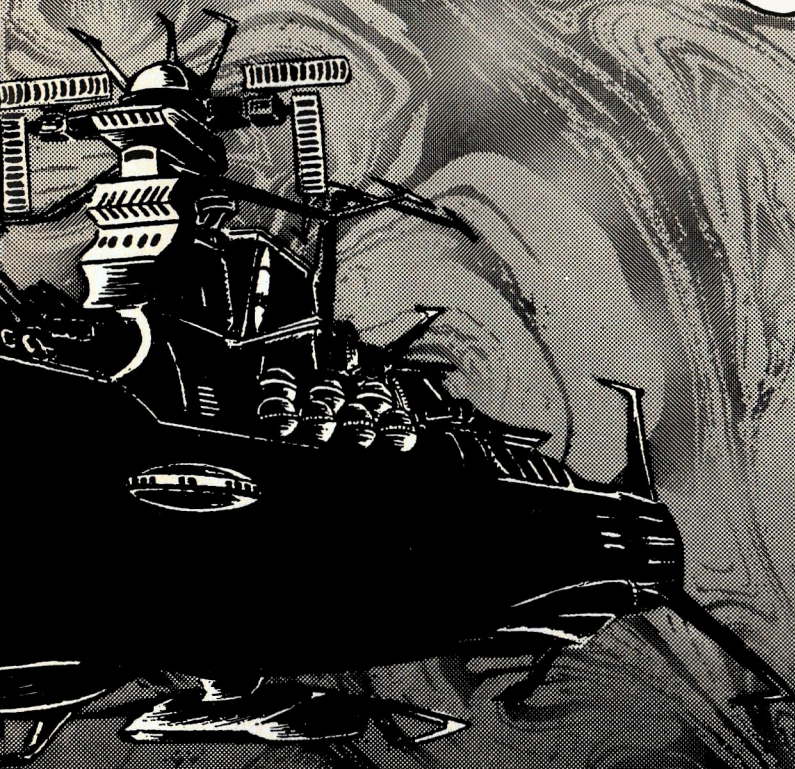
TO THE PAST - AND
TO THE FUTURE... WHEN
YOU RUN BEYOND LIGHT
AND TIME, TETSURO, YOU
WILL BE ABLE TO MEET
THEM AGAIN...

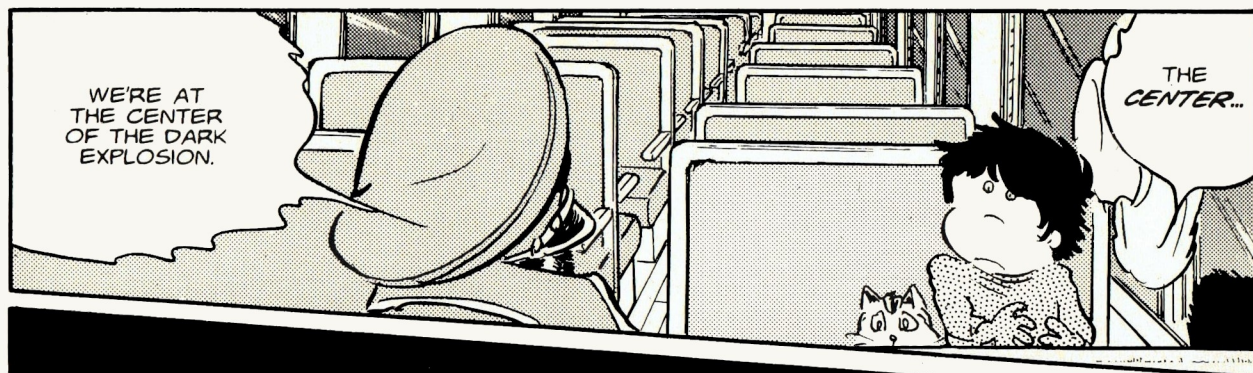


VEEEE



EEEEEOOOOOO

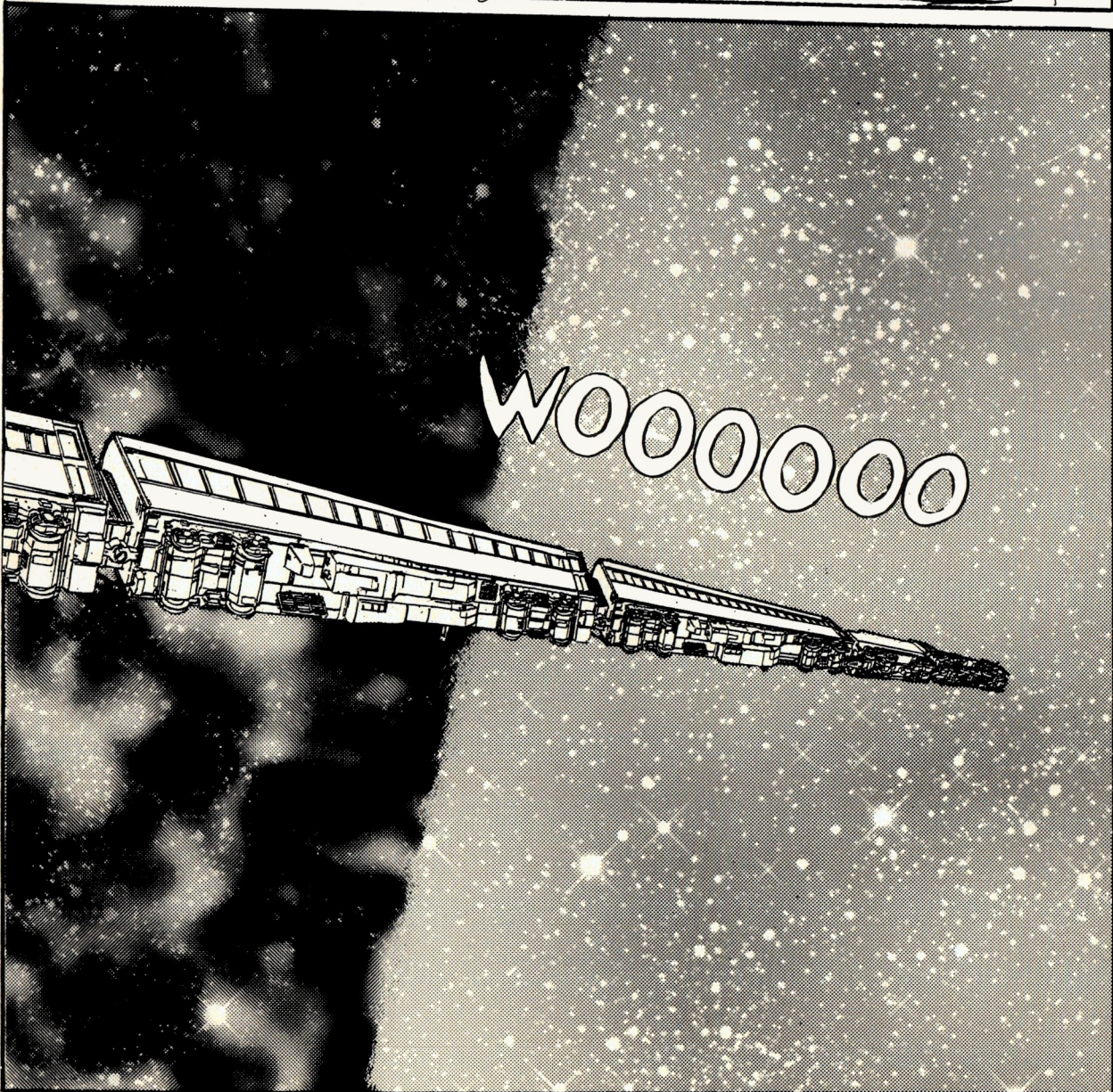
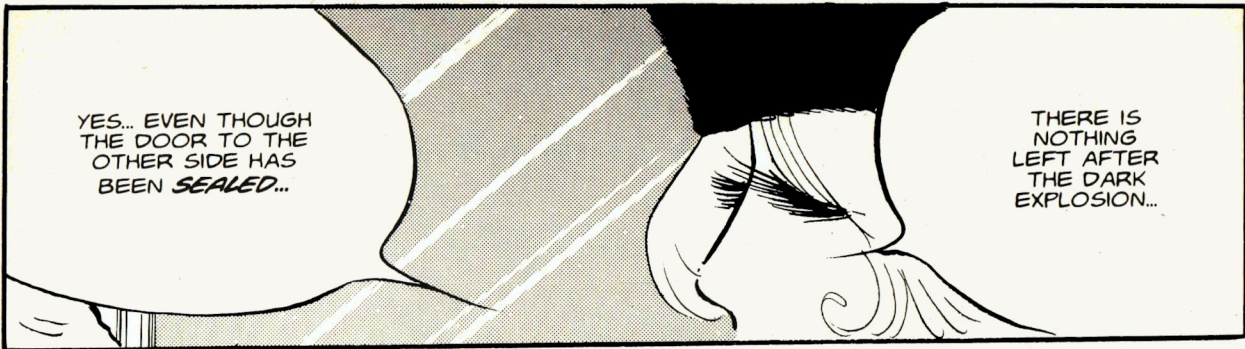






TH-THERE'S
NOTHING! THIS IS A
NULL SPACE!

THAT'S WHAT IT
LOOKS LIKE... YET
SOMETHING SEEMS
TO BE FLOATING...
I FEEL WEIRD...



TO BE CONTINUED!

explosion!

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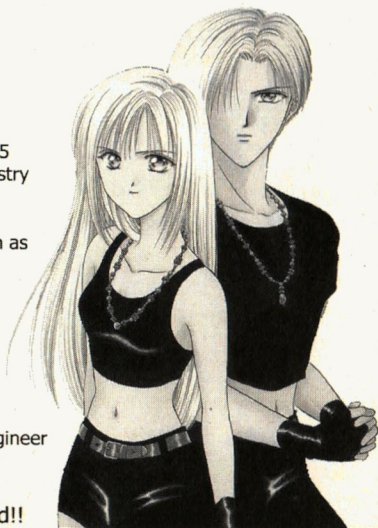
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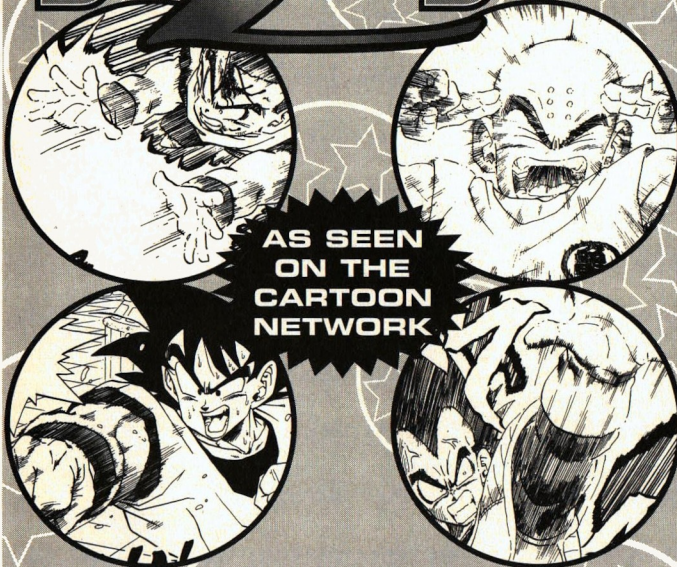
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DRAGON BALL



AS SEEN
ON THE
CARTOON
NETWORK

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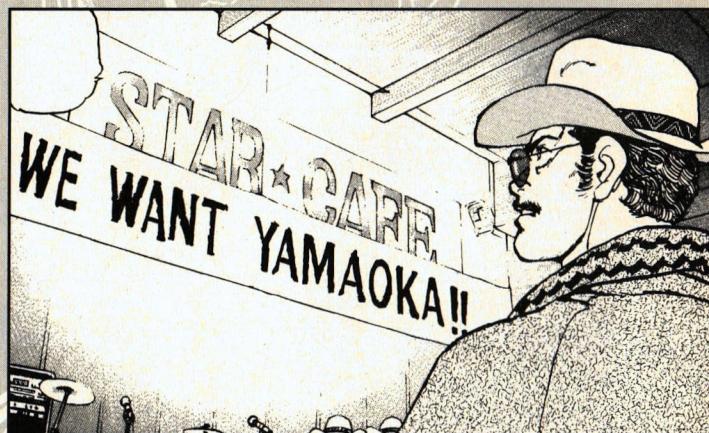
an affair with his mother—that he is the father Takashi never knew?



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IN JUNE: EAGLE BOOK THREE (COLLECTS MONTHLY VOLS. 9-12)

ON JIN-ROH AND THE POPULARITY OF ANIME MOVIES

Japan produces the most animation of anywhere in the world, but the reality is that theatrical-release anime are in a difficult spot. Many television shows that are oriented towards children, such as *Digimon*, *Pokémon*, *Doraemon*, and *Crayon Shin-chan*, have been adapted into theatrical movies and have earned top profits for the entertainment industry. However, anime features that have nothing to do with TV series are often left dormant even after their production is completed—they are still waiting to be actually released in theaters.

Why? In simple terms, the management of anime companies, or rather, the distribution companies, tend to distance themselves from any projects they are unfamiliar with. As an example of this, close to two years passed between the completion of *Jin-Roh*'s production work and its actual theatrical release.

I'd been hearing things about *Jin-Roh*'s completion and its not-yet-being-released-in-theaters status for a long time. I heard such things as, "the staff from *Patlabor 2* worked on it." "The people who worked on *Spriggan* worked on it." And I knew that it was going to be a high-quality anime production. But I also knew that it was based on Mamoru Oshii's *Kenroh Densetsu* and felt that it was going to have some serious content that might be popular only with hardcore anime fans. With this in mind, I figured that this was the reason that *Jin-Roh* wasn't released immediately after its production was completed, and that it was something that couldn't be helped.

In the Fall of the year before last, *Jin-Roh* played in Paris for an event on Japan sponsored by the French Ministry of Culture. *LE MOND*, among other major newspapers, gave favorable criticisms of the film. At last, the seed had been planted and the following year (last year), the release date for *Jin-Roh* was finally decided upon, based on the acclaim that it got from playing in one theater in France. It seems that in Japan, there is a tendency not to resist a film's release if it was regarded favorably abroad. Even if it plays just once in one theater in France, the Japanese mass media write about it, and people want to go see it. Thus, when it opened in Japan, *Jin-Roh* ran in theaters for an extremely long time.

To be frank, I didn't think that the general public would accept *Jin-Roh* to the degree it did. At least, I didn't think that the general film fan who usually has nothing to do with anime would accept it.

The *Jin-Roh* world is closer to the comic,

Kenroh Densetsu by Mamoru Oshii and Kamui Fujiwara, than it is to the live-action movies *Akai Megane* ("Red Spectacles") and *Kerberos* ("Cerebus") directed by Oshii. Director Hiroyuki Okiura's production removes the deep and difficult taste of Oshii and earnestly and honestly portrays its world—a world that is nostalgic for someone born in the '50s such as myself. For me, the movie is moving even just for this aspect of it. In addition, the performances of the characters felt incredibly natural. It felt exactly like you had watched a live-action movie.

But then, you might ask, Why didn't they just make it as a live action movie? Regardless of its "live" quality, the structure of the story was something that could only have been achieved through the anime

medium. I was allowed the rare opportunity to see how far the expression of Japanese anime had developed, and to be very moved by it.

But I also wondered how many fans actually wanted to see this type of movie. *Jin-Roh* was successful, both in terms of its quality and how it was able to motivate people to go see it. It was a success of the entertainment industry, although a small-scale one, relatively speaking.

Would it have had the same level of success had it been released through the normal channels of anime distribution? I think this would have been difficult. The reason for this is simple—while Japan is the kingdom of anime, it has not fostered adult anime fans. Or rather, anime has not fostered moviegoing fans. Regardless of the content of the anime, there is a tendency in Japan to look down upon an adult who watches anime. When something such as *Jin-Roh* or *Evangelion* becomes a hot topic for the mass media, this spell disappears.

This is unfortunate. Although *Jin-Roh* was a hit, there are still many anime films waiting to be released because of the stubborn manner in which anime is regarded. The anime movies of Japan continue to be in a difficult spot. ☆



Takashi Oshiguchi's tenure as manager of Tokyo's Manga no Mori ("Comics Forest") has been invaluable for his role as an anime/manga journalist. His writings have appeared in ANIMAGE magazine and the comic trade journal COMIC BOX.



A live-action "Jin-Roh" from Oshii's 1990 film *Kerberos*

The story of one man's escape to
the Land of the Rising Sun....

Geoffrey Tebbetts'

DIARIES OF THE COUNTRY BUMPKIN



MARCH 21, 2001
FOLLOWING THE HORDE (AT 20 YEN PER MINUTE)

"Can you pick me up?"

This has become one of the most common English phrases I have used in Japan, outranked only by, "Boy, it's cold!" and "Yes, I know how to use chopsticks." Due to my busy schedule, I have yet to button down and go looking for a dependable car. (If I had bought one here already, you would have already read about that tale already.) Because of that, I have to bum rides off my friends, and that requires a phone.

I figured that a pay phone would be okay for a while, but the experiences were horrid. There aren't many that are conveniently located, and 10-yen coins only give you a short amount of time when you do find one. You can use 100-yen coins, but the machines never give back change. Phone booths are even worse, as they are too cramped to do anything. If I was going to make any phone calls on the road in Japan, I'd have to do what half of the population had done before me: buy a cellular phone.

Cellular phones (*keitai*) have become one of the most popular gadgets in Japan. As the phones constantly get smaller, the technology involved gets more advanced. Cellular phones aren't just used as phones in Japan—they are beginning to be used as many other handheld devices, from digital cameras to portable radios. This has spurred a boom in sales, as well as made the *keitai* a necessity in modern culture. In fact, some sources blame the boom for sluggish manga sales—why read on a train when you could call your friends, check e-mail, listen to music, and so on?

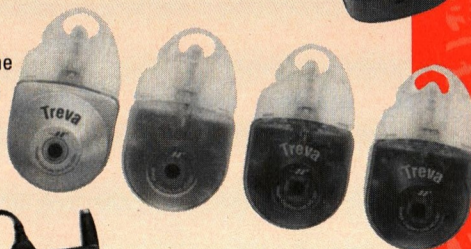
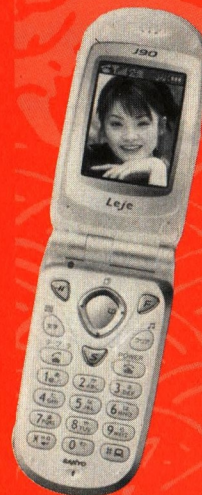
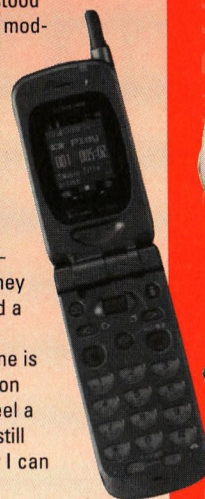
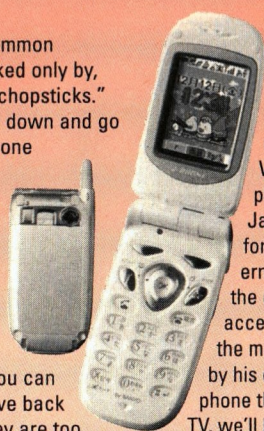
With all the pressure to stay in touch ("Everyone is connected," the Lain in me keeps saying), I bought one, but not without experiencing all of the confusion buying a phone now creates. I chose a company, but started to ask myself questions. What color do I want? What model? What about battery life? Color display or black-and-white? Voice-mail? By the time I chose one, my mind was spinning, but there were more questions to be asked by the salesperson.

Do I want this phone for e-mail? Of course not, I told myself—this is a phone. If I wanted to communicate with friends, I'd call them. Duh! What about taking pictures? Sounded cool, but again, this was a phone. If pictures needed to be taken, my friends could wait until the film was developed. What about listening to MP3s? Playing video games? Surfing the Web? Finding out about tomorrow's weather? Programming songs for when it rings? At that point, I was ready to grab the nearest phone, toss my wallet at

the clerk, and run for the hills, screaming.

While a *keitai* does make things convenient, it makes me wonder if we really need all of this technology in the palm of our hand. Are we really that desperate to want to e-mail our friends when it'd be easier to call them? Whatever happened to using a phone as just a phone? I suppose the *keitai* has become in Japan what the automobile once stood for in America—a status symbol in modern culture. The cooler the phone, the cooler the owner. The more accessories and capabilities it has, the more the holder will be admired by his or her friends. If we buy the phone that a celebrity is sponsoring on TV, we'll be like that celebrity. I've also come to the conclusion that it's a major possession to be counted as hip in high school—when I asked my junior-high students what they wanted for Christmas, many said they wanted a *keitai*, even if they had no reason why.

And so, I've joined the collective. The phone is nice to have, and it will be a good conversation piece to show my family when I go home. I feel a little cooler, but it's still just a phone to me. I still have to bum rides off my friends, except now I can do it without the pains of a phone booth and with the pains of Morning Musume ringing in my ear. ☆



Geoffrey Tebbetts currently works for the JET program as an assistant English teacher in Matsuyama, Japan



KIT FOX WRITES FROM JAPAN

TOKYO KITSUNE



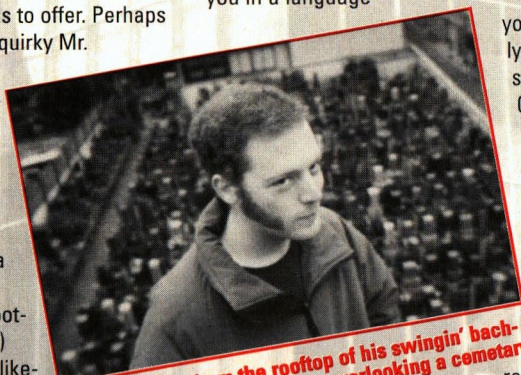
APRIL 6, 2001

These days it's a pretty well known fact that when American celebrities are on a cash run, they quickly head east for the lucrative commercial deals Japan has to offer. Perhaps you've seen some of these quirky Mr. Sparkle-ish non sequiturs on a "World's Zaniest Commercial Show," or maybe on one of the many web sites dedicated to the airing out of Hollywood celeb's shameful endorsement campaigns. Anyway, a day doesn't go by on Japanese TV without my spotting one (if not two or three) familiar faces lending their likeness to Japanese products they'll never ever use.

As of now, I've seen both Spike Lee and Ashley Judd pimping family wagons, Brad Pitt expounding upon the greatness of Edwin 503 jeans, Jean Reno prancing down a sunny beach plugging what I believe to be some kind of life insurance company (however it could just as easily be a new Gallic themed sports drink), Takeshi Kaneshiro and Cameron Diaz literally ordering you to learn English, and Maria Carey doing her darndest to convince all of Japan to drink coffee out of a can. Did I mention that George Clooney drives a Saturn? In a recent slew of car commercials he sure does, and looks so cool doing it. Print ads are just as abundant. One out of every three vending machines carries a picture of Tyler Durden's mug, hand firmly (yet respectfully) clenching a can of Roots coffee. Near the west exit at Shinjuku station is a poster of Jodie Foster either hocking diamonds, designer pens, or possibly German lessons.

However, the most omnipresent celeb advertisement in circulation now is Ewan McGregor's AEON campaign. Some days it seems as if the Diet passed a law making it illegal for any train or subway car to have less than sixty-eight of these ads in one given spot. Everywhere I look I see *Trainspotting*'s plucky protagonist lying down on a bed of grass with a big beef-burrito-eating grin the size of

Kansas spread all over his popularly marketable face. I think if you join AEON now (which offers tutoring in English, French, and a couple other foreign tongues) you even get a limited edition "hear Ewan McGregor talk to you in a language



The Fox, seen from the rooftop of his swingin' bachelor pad....behind a temple....overlooking a cemetery

Japanese businesspeople just gave me a tractor load of quid to say nothing of consequence and take a picture or two. Joke's on you!"

Why do so many Hollywood big names agree to make such embarrassing commercials? Easy. The money is really good, and they all sign contracts which explicitly say that these ads will never be shown outside of Japan, or so they think. See, the Internet does have a practical use after all.

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As much as I love Japan, the weather here can be downright abysmal. Summer is excruciatingly humid whereas winter is unbelievably cold. However, for the first two weeks of spring, Japan seems like the best place in the world to be. Why? Because it's *hana-mi* (flower viewing) season, and the cherry blossoms are in full bloom. At this time, Ueno Park is literally exploding with pink petals. Rows of cherry blossom trees stretch almost endlessly down

you can barely understand" CD. Could be worth joining just to hear what he has to say.

Might go something like, "These really nice

Japanese businesspeople just



The infamous Golgo 13 sharp-shooter arcade game....just one bullet....

the lane, making the notion of work, school, or any kind of responsibility downright unthinkable. So how do the Japanese show their appreciation for this dispensation from heaven? They throw down a tarp, park themselves under the nearest tree, and proceed to get as drunk as humanly possible. Random acts of public idiocy abound. I've seen everything from strip bingo to Credence Clearwater *karaoke* revivals, all underneath a canopy of radiant pink. It's fun to stroll through any public park area and marvel at the hundreds of flower-viewing enthusiasts. Some people seem to camp out for days in order to secure the perfect drinking spot. Elaborate cardboard table structures are erected in the name of public drunkenness. Many groups even bring gas stoves for cooking *oden*, *sukiyaki*, *ramen* and much more. It seems as if for this moment and time the hustle and bustle of Japanese life is thrown out the window and the entire nation just chills out and ties one on. However, being the only sober Sunday stroller in a world of happy drunks isn't all that fun, but within minutes, random salarymen are literally filling my hands with every manner of alcoholic beverage imaginable. Fun for every-

one from junior to the grandpa, and the scenic view comes complimentary of the house. In fact, it's almost enough to make me forget about that monster of a *kanji* test I've got coming up. Almost....

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Ever want to enjoy the unparalleled ecstasy of playing *pachinko* without ever having to fly to Japan? It's easy. Just walk to the nosiest, dirtiest, most crowded metropolitan area you can find, situate yourself in the middle of the action, and commence ripping hundred dollar bills in half for up to (but not exceeding) three hours at a time. It's safe, sanitary and so simple you'll wonder why you've never tried it before. ★

Major Anime™

Major Anime™'s AnimeIcon™ System
Whether you're a parent worried about nudity or a sci-fi buff just looking for girls with guns, the helpful icons below will aid you in your quest for the perfect video.

 **Courtesy Breasts** Cover the younguns' eyes; there's young misses prancing around without their tops on or other nudie displays.

 **ESP** Extrasensory powers, such as telepathy, firestarting, telekinesis...also includes sorcery.

 **Ultraviolence** Gratuitous weaponry and explosions don't qualify by themselves; be on the lookout for severed body parts and/or buckets of gore.

 **Masterpiece Theater** Consider this an anime classic; may contain socially redeeming themes.

 **Kung-Fu Fighting** Martial arts of all shapes and sizes, silly and serious.

 **Romantic Hijinks** Boy meets girl; boy loses girl and comes back with her sisters; the neighbors interfere, etc.

 **Mondo Mecha** From spaceships to cyborgs to giant wooden robots, the kind of mechanical devices you'll find only in anime.

 **Super Science** Traditional sci-fi gadgets, themes, and plot devices, both silly and serious. May include mad scientists.

 **Not of This World** Close encounters of a less-than-friendly kind with invaders from other worlds or dimensions. They never come in peace and often leave in pieces.

 **Evil Overlord** Megalomania, anime style. World domination is the theme when you see this one.

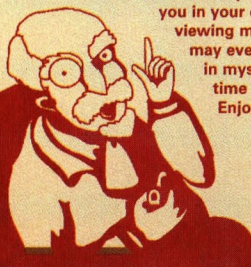
 **Idol Singers** Expect to hear singing from girls (sometimes boys) in outrageous costumes.

 **Bad Words** I#@&! Beware: salty language ahead. Use caution with younger viewers.

 **Naughty Tentacles** 'Nuff said.

The major sez...

Welcome, my friends, to the wonderful world of Japanese animation! This is my domain, Best of the West, where my reliable crew of reviewers attempts to guide you in your choices of viewing material. I may even chime in myself from time to time. Enjoy!



REVIEWS

BEST OF THE WEST

anime

WEST

SLOW BUT SURELY SAMURAI

SAMURAI X THE MOTION PICTURE

ADV Films • English VHS/Bilingual DVD • 90 mins. • US\$19.98/\$29.98
• DVDSX/003 (DVD) • Based on the manga by Nobuhiro Watsuki.
TV series available on video from Anime Works



© 1997 N. Watsuki/Shueisha • Fuji TV • SPE Visual Works

Polished, sleek animation provides the backdrop for a drama that delves into the nature of self-redemption and burden of a guilty past. "Rurouni" Kenshin is a samurai who seeks peace from the memories of those who died by his sword in the name of revolution. Swearing not to kill again, he carries a special blunted sword incapable of spilling any more blood. Unfortunately, life rarely gives us what we want, and Kenshin soon finds this truth out, when forces beyond his control amass and he must again kill to protect those he loves. Motivated by the urge to save lives, he must *take* lives, putting him in the very place that he has tried to avoid. What will it cost to save those dear to him this time? And how will he be able to forgive himself for the blood his sword will have to spill? *Samurai X* (a.k.a. *Rurouni Kenshin*) deals with this classic theme and reflects the ironic nature of life. (Dang, that's *profound*. When I start writing like that, I stick my face in a coffee cup right afterward and say, "Deep...")

Samurai X: The Motion Picture takes place in a city that's bustling with economic activity involving trade with Western nations. This period, known as the Bakumatsu (1853-1868), marked the end of Japan's isolationist period. Although guns and artillery existed, many still clung to the old ways and bullets clashed with traditional samurai swords. This was a time when the remnants of the old world—medieval samurai—rebelled against the inevitable winds of change. This period is often seen in Japan as the equivalent of the Wild West in America. It is romanticized by most and seen as the last stand of the human spirit before factories and nine-to-five jobs squashed it, replacing the samurai and gunslingers with businessmen and managers. As we all know, the ways of old must succumb to change, and this conflict is the subtext for the rest of the story.

Although *Rurouni Kenshin's* roots are a romantic samurai manga, there's a surprise built into the setting of this story, which is urban, not rural. Traditional samurai tales usually take place deep within a thick forest, on barren mountainsides, or on massive cliffs overlooking streams reflecting ominous moons. Using nature as a

backdrop for samurai stories reinforces the premise that the heroic samurai were a people who were beyond the trappings of the world of normal men and sought the peace and meditation found only in the sublime mystery of nature. (This also goes for many Chinese martial arts films—*Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, for example.) In a way, telling the bulk of Kenshin's tale against the backdrop of a city robs this anime of its full dramatic potential. Kenshin would have benefited from the tranquil atmosphere, especially considering the many times he gets lost in his own thoughts.

Samurai X: The Motion Picture is not the most exciting anime on Earth to watch, mostly because of its heavy subject matter. Its pacing is also a problem—the story moves slower than a bathroom line when you really have to go, although it's shot through with bits of fighting action. The plot is complex, forcing you to pay close attention. Kenshin also has the same flashback about eight times throughout the course of the anime, and by the time you've seen it four or five times, even the most devoted anime fan's patience can wear a little thin. Action scenes are used sparingly through most of the movie, as if saving them up for the big-bang ending, which does indeed give you action with both barrels in an incredible showdown involving those foreign devils with guns against sword-wielding Japanese rebels dressed in white. The fighting in *Samurai X*, although bloody, is shown in a tasteful way, and it has an degree of sophistication uncommon for action-oriented anime.

If you're a fan of the show, you'll likely be thrilled seeing questions about your favorite characters addressed, but if you don't know the TV series story, you might be bored. *Samurai X: The Motion Picture* is a samurai anime with highbrow appeal that introduces the concept of tasteful violence without becoming too avant garde and alienating its audience. Fun for fans, a little slow, but worth the stretch for newcomers, *Samurai X* takes an age-old genre and adds an unexpected touch of class.

Dr. Brown

REVIEWS

BEST OF THE WEST

anime

WEST

WHO'S GOT THE LAST LAUGH?

SLAYERS THE BOOK OF SPELLS OAV COLLECTION



ADV Films • Bilingual DVD • 75 mins. • US\$29.98 • DVDSDL/002 • Nagha's laugh can substitute for country music in *Mars Attacks!*

Ah, *Slayers*. Like the great Atlas of myth, this series seemed to carry the entire genre of comedic fantasy on its shoulders until the entrance of *Sorcerer Hunters* and the like. Regardless, this baby ages like a fine wine and no one can deny that *Slayers* is the series by which all others in its category are judged. While the *Slayers* OAVs continue the zany slapstick of the TV series, the two should not be mistaken as being of the same continuum. There are notable differences, such as the inclusion of the unmistakable Nagha the Serpent as Lina's traveling and (conceivably) drinking buddy, and the exclusion of Goury and Amelia. For those not in the know, Nagha is Lina's uninhibited perennial rival with an unmatched ego and the cup size to go with it. Horror stories of her laugh are told to bad kids to scare them straight. Currently, to even speak her name is illegal in 32 states.

Now I'm not besmirching the guy in charge of this, but maybe ADV should have changed the title to *Slayers: Make the Laughing Stop!* I mean, ouch—talk about bleeding ears. In the first episode, mad scientist/chemist Diol wants to create the most powerful creature to ever walk the Earth: A chimera with Lina as one of its heads! Of course, Lina can't abide by this plan, but Nagha is more than willing to contribute to the cause, and before long, Diol's conjured up an entire army of busty Nagha clones to break down the petite sorceress' resistance. Ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you, no amount of hellfire or sharp,

pointy things is quite so bloodcurdling as seven—count 'em, seven—Naghas laughing. Don't be surprised to see this one on a top ten list of "Scariest Anime Episodes."

The next two episodes, while just as funny as most *Slayers* fare, don't really bring anything new to the table and can at times be a little tough to swallow. My main gripe would definitely be the almost total lack of plot direction. Are these episodes building up to something more epic, or is this just another nice-looking video series about to lose its fizz? The jury is still out on that one.

FEATURES: Comparing the image quality from VHS to DVD, technology prevails again with this magical little disc coming out leaps and bounds ahead. Whenever a well animated series is involved, DVD will always be the best choice if you want to see the vibrance of color and smoothness of picture that big-budget features have to offer—certainly *Slayers* keeps with this trend. The scene where seven Naghas emerge from a plaza fountain will not only prove this point but also cause heart murmurs. Even though it sounds great in Dolby Surround Sound, I still question the soundtrack choice for these episodes, which would really be more appropriate for, say, *Record of Lodoss War*, than a slapstick comedy. And although light on the extra features, there is a nice production portfolio that fans will certainly enjoy...but then again it was also included on the VHS.

Matthew Lopez



SPIKE SPIEGEL'S YOUNGER, REDHEADED BROTHER OUTLAW STAR DVD VOL.



Bandai • Bilingual DVD • 225 mins. • US\$44.98 • 0820 • Two heads are better than one

Chances are, if you've heard of *Outlaw Star*, you've probably sat down for an episode on the Cartoon Network too. Not only does this series occupy one of the most lucrative timeslots for cartoons on cable TV ever but it's also darn good to boot! Part of *Outlaw Star's* success in the fan market is due to the nature of its content in relation to this genre's current standard-bearers:

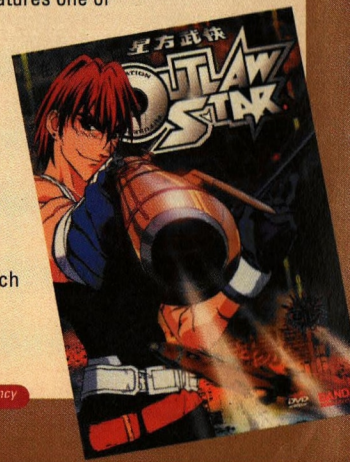
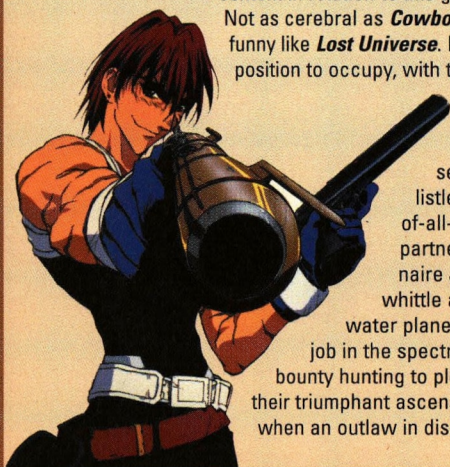
Not as cerebral as *Cowboy Bebop*, yet not off-the-wall funny like *Lost Universe*. In my opinion, this is an important position to occupy, with the recent glut in space opera/sci-fi anime and all.

As seen on TV and in its original 13-tape, 26-episode series, *Outlaw Star* is the story of listless and irrepressible young jack-of-all-trades, Gene Starwind, and his partner in business, techie extraordinaire Jim Hawking. Together, these two whittle away this mortal coil on the backwater planet of Sentinel III performing any job in the spectrum to pay the bills, ranging from bounty hunting to plow repair, each daydreaming of their triumphant ascension into the sea of stars. But when an outlaw in disguise hires Starwind Enterprises

as bodyguards, life as these two galactic hicks know it is about to take a turn for the unexpected. Throw in a hyper-strong cat-girl named Aisha, the bokuto-wielding female assassin Suzuka, and a bio-android named Melfina that holds the key to the universe, and you've got the recipe for a show that can't help but entertain you.

FEATURES: Image quality is pleasantly at that high-end, very crisp level the DVD medium has promised for so long yet has never seemed to materialize. This is a great advantage for *Outlaw Star*, since this show features one of the most unique and blindingly fast forms of space combat with the use of "grappler arms" (huge ship-mounted robotic arms used for work and combat), and I had a ball working the slow motion and freeze-frame buttons of our controller, trying to follow the furious action in all its hi-fi glory. Best of all, Bandai has become the leader in a new wave of TV series mass-release protocols, with this series being released on DVD at the gluttonous rate of *nine episodes per two-disc pack!* Only in few instances before were anime fans able to get so much content for so little! Do I hear a late-night anime gorge-fest coming on, ladies and gentlemen?

Matthew Lopez



© Morning Star • Sunrise/Shueisha • Sotsu Agency



YOUR FRIENDS AND HUNTERS

ARC THE LAD

VOL. 1: HUNTERS AND MONSTERS



ADV Films • English VHS/Bilingual DVD • 75 mins. • US\$19.98/\$29.98 •
VAR/001 (VHS)/DAR/001 (DVD) • Based on the PlayStation games



The futuristic setting of *Arc the Lad* includes elements of our current technology as well as that of the Industrial Age. Surprisingly, the lead character is not Arc himself but a boy named Elk, a “hunter” (bounty hunter) who believes that Arc was responsible for the destruction of his hometown.

Arc the Lad tells a simple, old-fashioned story—Elk and his adventures—balanced out by several concurrently running storylines of enigmatic figures conspiring to carry out genetic experiments. The opening episode is definitely in the *Die Hard* vein, as Elk and a fellow hunter board a blimp whose passengers have been taken hostage. In the process of rescuing the hostages, Elk uncovers the schemes of an organization that is creating human/monster hybrids. He also becomes entangled with a girl and her doglike monster, who are targets

of the organization. In the second episode, Elk is joined by Shu, the hunter who saved his life when he was a child and raised him while teaching him to be a hunter. The two come to the aid of the girl and her monster, as his fellow hunters try to collect the bounty on the head of the monster. The third episode falls apart a little, as it is mostly dry exposition with a few fun instances of the voice-actors hamming it up in particularly dramatic moments. It's in this episode that we learn a little about Arc. Ironically, he appears for only a few seconds in the whole first volume.

Unlike most game-based anime, *Arc the Lad* is not plagued by annoying cameo appearances of game characters who usually end up working against the plot. There's no need to be familiar with the game to get into things. It also benefits from production design that goes a little above and beyond what's expected—the imaginative background matte paintings in many scenes are excellent, elevating the not-particularly-stunning animation to a higher level. Credit must also be given to the English voice-cast, a good mix of the familiar (whoever does the voice of Elk's employer seems to do the voice of every other gruff old guy in anime) and the new (Elk's voice actually sounds age-appropriate). The closing song performed by NiNa (that's how they spell it) is really catchy, and listening to it three times in one sitting might permanently brand it in your mind. *Arc the Lad* doesn't break any new ground, but it's pretty darn entertaining in what it tries to do.

FEATURES: There's no way to tiptoe around it: The DVD of *Arc the Lad* is horrible. Hasn't the DVD format evolved to the point where scene-selection screens and advertisements shouldn't be counted as “special features”? Unfortunately, that's all you get, aside from the expected language selection. The image quality of the disc is just fine, but the audio is downright abysmal—a reasonable Japanese track and an English track that sounds muted and flat, as if the English audio was just mixed on top of the existing sound. You can hear the difference—as well as an unfortunate contrast in volume—by switching back and forth between the two tracks. It's a shame more care wasn't put into producing this disc.

Rio Yañez



© 1999 Sony Computer Entertainment

TROUBLE BREWING

IRRESPONSIBLE CAPTAIN TYLOR

OVA COLLECTION • VOLS. 3 and 4



The Right Stuff • English VHS/Subtitled VHS • 90 mins. each •
US\$19.95/\$19.95 • RS9223, RS9224 (Subtitled) • How does a razor
relate to a berserk battle suit? How would I know?



The UPSF/Raalgon war has quieted down, so the crew of the destroyer *Soyokaze* has been assigned to ground duty. These two volumes of the *Captain Tylor* OVA Collection present us with four more episodes, detailing the misadventures of everybody's favorite crew of outcasts.

In “The High-Tech Opposition,” the Marines learn that they'll have to go back to school if they want to use the UPSF's newest fighting machine. When the suit goes crazy, however, it isn't high-tech that saves the day but good old Marine muscle power. The next episode, “White Christmas,” is a bit different. It's Christmas Eve, and Yuriko decides to take the plunge and ask Tylor out. Things get out of hand when a child delivers what could be a bomb to headquarters and then proceeds to dog Tylor wherever he goes. Despite all this, Tylor makes it to the park to meet Yuriko, albeit five hours late.

In the fourth volume's “If Only the Skies Would Clear,” transports have been disappearing on the frontier for some time, and the UPSF orders Yuriko to investigate. After she is kidnapped by Raalgon goons, Lt. Yamamoto rescues her. He is then assigned to an escort fleet on the frontier. Here, he encounters a strange force, and his fleet is destroyed. Confined to quarters upon his return, Yamamoto learns a bit about honor while at the same time getting an idea about his mysterious foe.

I have to admit that, while the TV series was excellent, I had trouble warming up to the *Captain Tylor* OVAs. They seemed like pointless additional adventures...that is, of course, until now. Now we can see that there is a big picture and that trouble is brewing, but we don't yet know what that trouble is.

Animation-wise, these episodes are spectacular. The new Marine battlesuit is very nicely drawn, and all the animation is fluid. The Christmas episode was very nice, although the art style was quite different. I didn't even recognize Yuriko at first! The overall feel of this series is that of an older anime—I got a massive *Macross* movie vibe, which added immensely to my enjoyment.

Overall, these tapes are excellent. The dub is a bit off at times, but it's something you can live with. (My copy of Volume 3 had some audio troubles, so the dialogue was hard to hear.) Regardless, with great animation, well-known characters, and what looks like a big finish brewing, these two volumes are a good addition to your library. Don't be a Tylor—go get them now!

Adam Rehorn



COLD SHOULDER

GASARAKI

VOL. 3: BETRAYAL



ADV Films • English VHS/Bilingual DVD • 75 mins. •
US\$19.98/\$29.98 • DVDGK/003 (DVD) • Ryosuke Takahashi's
mecha masterpiece continues its advance

The war in Belgistan is over. The Gowa/JSDF team was able to capture part of an enemy "Fake," or Tactical Armour (TA), and the mysterious Symbol organization wants it back. Symbol also wants to get its hands on Yushiro Gowa, a civilian pilot who was part of the JSDF TA team. With agents located all over the world, it should be a simple matter for Symbol, right?

The Japanese TA team's return home ends up becoming something of a political hot potato. With Symbol agents fanning the flames, the controversy surrounding the TAs threatens to create a rift in Japan's political system. Amidst this chaos, the TA team is sequestered for debriefing and to keep them from leaking any politically explosive information. To minimize the damage, Yushiro is smuggled out. After all, if it were found out that a civilian was part of the combat team, things could go from bad to a whole lot worse. Symbol, meanwhile, has got its own TAs in Japan, and they make a daring raid on the Gowa central research lab. The second phase of their plan, to capture Yushiro, is also set in motion. When the Symbol TAs attack Gowa's "Stone Stage," however, they get a thorough beating by a Kugai. What's a Kugai, you ask? That's what everybody, including its "pilot" Yushiro, would

like to know!

Gasaraki is one of the most convoluted anime series to come along in a while. These three episodes are each integral parts of the puzzle, and there's just as much political battling as actual physical combat. This is **Gasaraki's** strength, however—it keeps you drawn in with a huge web of plot and counterplot, conspiracy, and misinformation. This is one of those shows that you'll only understand once you've seen it all.

Technically, **Gasaraki** is brilliant. The battles are beautifully rendered, and the use of gawdawful CG is limited to the TA display screens, where it's actually appropriate. Unfortunately, a lot of the battles take place at night, so you can't easily see what's going on. What gets me going, though, is the brutal practicality and realism of the TAs. Weapons fans will appreciate the small details, believe me.

This volume is really important—a lot of secrets come to the surface. Fans of conspiracies, political maneuvering, armored warfare and hard sci-fi will find lots to love. Others might take a while to appreciate **Gasaraki's** large assortment of charms. Mecha profiles in the DVD booklet are a nice touch.

Adam Rehorn



© Sunrise • TVO

LIKE A RAINBOW IN THE DARK

THE LEGEND OF BLACK HEAVEN

VOL. 2: SPACE TRUCKIN' and VOL. 3: ALL RIGHT NOW



Pioneer • English VHS/Bilingual DVD • 75 mins. each •
US\$24.98/\$29.98 • 10502/10503 (DVD) • "And I see that
it's free and it's me who's lost and never found." —
Ronnie James Dio

Oji Tanaka pushes paper for a living. However a decade ago, he and his friends burned up the stage as the legendary band Black Heaven. Now Oji's skills are in demand once again, this time by a race of extraterrestrials fighting a desperate war. For some reason, his sound is able to activate their ultimate weapon, and they recruit him to aid in their battles.

After a few performances for the alien officer Layla Yuki, Oji begins to really get back into his music. He even composes a new song (which sounds very similar to Dio's "Last in Line"). Unfortunately, when the opportunity presents itself, the new song fails to trigger the weapon, resulting in heavy casualties.

When Oji learns that the aliens really don't care about his music, he throws a tantrum and vows to give it all up. However, the science officer on Layla's ship manages to convince him otherwise. Now "back in the groove," Oji decides to reassemble Black Heaven and really kick some alien butt. Unfortunately, the others in the band all seem to have prior commitments. What's a rocker to do?

I must admit that when I first heard about **Black Heaven**, I was not expecting much. Indeed, when I was explaining the concept to my brother, I could barely stop from laughing due to how cheesy the plot sounded. However, this show is seriously awesome. Animation-wise, **Black Heaven** is a blend of *El-Hazard*, *Lain*, and *Perfect Blue*. Unfortunately, the space

battles are CG, and they don't look right at all. Thankfully, the dubbing is excellent, and the actors do a good job at breathing life into the characters.

That last point is important, because **Black Heaven** is really a character-based show. It's the interactions between the characters and their own inner battles that matter here. There's something about Layla's shy sweetness toward Oji, Oji's wife's discontent, and the commitment of Black Heaven's former members to their families that makes the show seem alive. It's also nice to see a show where the indomitable spirit of youth is forced to give way to the demands of the practical, day-to-day grind—just like in real life.

For fans of good, character-driven anime, I don't think you will find a show better than **Black Heaven**. If you are a fan of rock 'n' roll, like myself (note to Dr. Brown: Poison rocks!), then **Black Heaven** will give you some neat insights into what happens after the curtain falls on your favorite band. In addition, you get that awesome theme song by Blue Murder's John Sykes.

If you like mindless street fighting or superpowered *chi* blasts, then **Black Heaven** is not going to be your cup of tea. However, if you like to watch something that challenges conventions and is both uplifting and frustrating at the same time, **Black Heaven** is *THE* show to watch!

Adam Rehorn





NOT EXACTLY FINAL FANTASY

AMON SAGA



Manga Entertainment • English VHS/Subtitled VHS/Bilingual DVD •
75 mins. • US\$19.95/\$24.95/\$24.95 • (catalog number unavailable) •
"Character supervision" by Yoshitaka Amano (*Final Fantasy*)

When it comes to fantasy anime, there's no shortage of titles to choose from—and lots more to come, no doubt. Anime is a perfect media for fantasy stories because it doesn't have the limitations of live-action film, with its technological special effects and high costs. Animators are free to make their fantasy worlds as elaborate and fantastic as their imaginations want and to weave stories out of myths from the days of ancient wisdom before the oceans swallowed Atlantis. When monsters roamed the Earth in broad daylight and sat on barstools side by side with knights and peasants. When taverns were filled with people and monsters drinking ale and getting sloshed, then barfing up human skeletal remains and passing out in a ditch on their way back to the swamps.

Amon Saga is about a young man whose mother was brutally murdered by an evil tyrant who travels the land in a massive palace perched on the back of a gigantic turtle's shell, destroying cities underfoot. The turtle fortress is straight out of the smash-hit arcade game *Golden Axe* (or did the video game steal this from the anime?). This nasty ruler is one bad dude with a great sense of humor—or at least it seems so, as he is frequently overcome by fits of maniacal laughter. If a person has sinister-sounding laughter combined with habitual baths in human blood, that *would* suggest that they are indeed evil.

Yoshitaka Amano, a well-respected designer of some of the most memorable monsters of anime (and video games) designed the characters and creatures in *Amon Saga*. This anime is about 15 years old, so it's very much in the spirit of Amano's work on the about-the-same-age-video *Vampire Hunter D*, complete with a "D" cameo (it's *not* actually the famous vampire hunter, but one of the minor characters looks exactly like him).

Amano's influence unfortunately goes only skin deep. The story strives to be epic but falls short. That's not to say it's all bad—there are pockets of interesting animation hidden in an otherwise humdrum piece of work. The saga begins on a high note as we find ourselves treated to an opening sequence of stylish animation with an avant garde edge. After this opening, the animation loses both its style and unconventional edge and settles down into somewhere between not-so-bad and unremarkable. But it does start off with a bang—the audience is treated to one of my personal favorite things to watch in the world, a barbarian barroom brouhaha. (It's a weakness of mine, but I freely admit I love watching big brutes beat the barley out of each other in some soggy little hole in the Middle Ages.) After that the ride gets bumpy, and it's not until the very end that we get anything really worthwhile. Brief moments of interest are sparked by the occasional wacky fantasy animal mix-and-match monsters showing up and getting brutally murdered—nutty critters like the Owl-Cat, the giant Snake-Fish (uhh...I thought those were called eels), and the Dragon-Ape. The Dragon-Ape is pretty scary, and a great idea because dragons are scary and apes are scary, and when the two are combined it's twice as scary.

There is a some kind of plot about a Golden Valley guarded by a golden beast that watches

Golden Girls, or something to that effect. The plot soon becomes muddled and irrelevant as the story shifts gears and our vengeful hero falls in love, has a few flashbacks, and sneaks around getting caught spying on people. Finally, the end is in sight, and it's the big showdown at the gates of the Golden Valley. At this point, the hero has amassed a small mob of fighters who are on his side. How he managed to get anyone to follow him is a mystery to me, considering he has the personality of a doorknob and he's not nearly as useful. Just when you're ready to hit "stop," the anime perks up, and there is a very entertaining wizard battle that has some eye-slapping, vivid, psychedelic, mystical blasts that woke me up momentarily.

Amon Saga's not the greatest, but it's not all bad—I would place it just above mediocre. There is one thing this anime has going for it, and that's Amano's distinctive character designs, well worthy of his legendary reputation. **Dr. Brown**



REVIEWS

BEST OF THE WEST

anime

WEST

MARTIAL ARTS AND MIND CONTROL

STREET FIGHTER II V DVD VOLS. 3 and 4



Manga Video • Bilingual DVD • Approx. 150 mins. each • US\$29.95 each • MANGA4071-2, MANGA4071-2 • Based on the game series; episodes 15-29 of the Japanese TV series

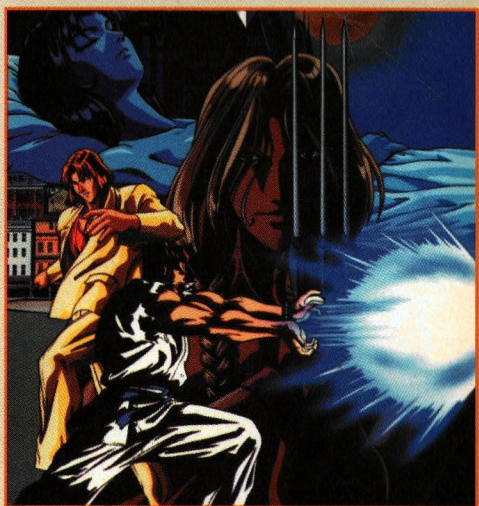
The second half of *Street Fighter II V* is contained on DVD volumes 3 (episodes 15-21) and 4 (22-29). This section of the 1995-96 animated TV series based on the popular video game focuses on the two young heroes, Ryu and Ken Masters, and their running battle with General Bison (Lord Vega on the Japanese track). Bison is the "Psycho-Powered" head of Shadowlaw who takes an interest in the boys' mastery of "hadou-ko," a technique they learned from Dhalsim in India in the previous volume. Volume 3 covers the events in Barcelona leading up to Bison's capture of Ken, Ryu, and Chun Li, including Ken's death match with the bloodthirsty bullfighter Vega (Balrog in the Japanese version). The final volume offers a series of assaults and battles as U.S. Special Forces Sergeants Guile and Nash penetrate Bison's island stronghold; Ken fights a mind-controlled Ryu; Guile fights a mind-controlled

Chun Li; Fei Long fights Cammy White; and finally, Ken and Ryu take on Bison in a final showdown of psycho power vs. hadou-ko. A subplot involves Cammy White's attempts to assassinate Chun Li's father, Inspector Dorai, after she's been hired by Shadowlaw double agent Balrog (Bison in the Japanese track, and that's the last of the name changes!).

One of the high points of the entire series occurs in the first half of episode 22. Ken is chained to a slab in an empty chamber in Bison's fortress and uses hadou power (the art of summoning up one's *chi*, or inner energy) to break his chains. Once free of the chains, he then does a more elaborate series of movements designed to generate the immense power of *Hadou Sho Ryu Ken* (Wave Motion Rising Dragon Punch), needed to burst out of the chamber through the overhead skylight. As the music speeds up, the waves of energy circling around Ken swirl faster and faster until his final shout of "Hadou Sho Ryu Ken!" and his muscular leap through the vaulted ceiling. The animation, music, facial expressions, and Japanese voice-acting all combine to create a truly sensual moment during the first buildup of power and an enormously liberating one when Ken finally breaks out in a burst of physical and emotional release that represents, for this reviewer, one of the most breathtaking sequences in all of Japanese animation.

Overall, however, these volumes are a letdown after the previous event-filled episodes, which took the boys all over the map. All the action takes place in Barcelona and at Bison's offshore island and offers little more in the way of plot development. Curiously, the final fight with Bison is held off until the last episode and seems rushed, ending the series on a dissatisfying note. (This was a problem with *Street Fighter II: The Animated Movie* as well.) The lengthy subplot involving Cammy White seems to have been added just to give a part to the sleek, deadly blonde who is, to be sure, designed and costumed very attractively. Chun Li's role is considerably diminished here, as she is first hypnotized by the seductive Vega and then programmed by Bison into a zombie-like state for most of volume 4.

The character design and animation quality vary greatly from episode to episode, with Guile and Cammy White suffering particularly shoddy treatment in some episodes; probably a function of Capcom farming out work to lesser animation studios in order to meet production deadlines. The quality of the fighting, however, remains high throughout, drawing on the distinctive style of movie fight choreography rather than video game fighting.



FEATURES: The DVD quality is quite sharp in some episodes, less so in others. The differences between the Japanese and English dialogue are not as pronounced here as in the earlier volumes, which are more dependent on dialogue, and the English voice-acting has improved a bit, although subsidiary characters continue to have farfetched American accents (e.g., Interpol agent Balrog is saddled with an exaggerated southern American black accent), and some grief-stricken moments have far greater emotional impact on the Japanese track. There are few extras on the discs other than brief trailers for other Manga releases; a trailer for *Street Fighter Alpha: The Movie* has been added. The original Japanese opening and closing songs for *SFIIV* are still missing.

Brian Camp



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THE Z WARRIORS MEET THEIR MATCH

DRAGON BALL Z

Z WARRIORS PREPARE • ANDROIDS: INVASION • ANDROIDS: DR. GERO • ANDROIDS: ASSASSINS • ANDROIDS: INVINCIBLE

FUNimation/Goldhil Home Media International • English VHS (edited or uncut) • 62 mins. each 3-episode vol. /82 mins. each 4-episode vol. • US\$14.95 each • Episodes 109-124 of the long-running intergalactic martial arts fantasy show



© Bird Studio/Shueisha • Toei

The five consecutive *Dragon Ball Z* volumes reviewed here begin the Androids cycle, set up in the preceding story arc, the two-volume Trunks saga. In that saga, Trunks, the son of Vegeta and Bulma, visits from the future to wipe out Frieza and his minions and warn Goku and company of the impending attack on human society by three superpowerful androids. In this cycle, after three years of training, Goku, Vegeta, Piccolo, Gohan, Krillin, Yamcha, and Tien gather to fight the androids but get more than they bargained for. Not three, but *five* androids are on hand, although not all at the same time.

As often happens in this long-running series, the plot takes its sweet time getting into motion. At the end of the fifth tape, *Androids: Invincible*, the androids have yet to embark on their campaign of world destruction. In the meantime, Goku is stricken, Vegeta and the others are beaten, and all make plans to regroup and recuperate while the surviving three androids journey across the putative American landscape attracting and initiating all sorts of clever mayhem.

The first tape, *Z Warriors Prepare*, actually serves as a transition between the Trunks and Androids sagas. It includes only two actual episodes but precedes them with a specially created 20-minute recap of the previous 108 episodes, to help casual viewers and newbies get up to speed. Of the episodes, only "Z Warriors Prepare" actually shows the crew in training, whereas "Goku's Ordeal" is a pointless, time-wasting side adventure about Chi-Chi's insistence that Goku and Piccolo take time away from their all-important training to get driver's licenses. *Androids: Invasion* offers four episodes, showing the start of the androids' invasion, led by Androids 19 and 20, who attack an island city and engage in a lengthy battle with Goku and company. *Androids: Dr. Gero* offers three episodes and identifies Android 20 as Dr. Gero, the androids' creator, who has recreated himself as part of a campaign of vengeance against Goku for defeating the Red Ribbon Army many long episodes ago. *Androids: Assassins*, with three episodes, introduces Androids 17 and 18, Gero's special creations, and Android 16, a gentle giant programmed only to fight Goku. A17 and A18 are a young boy-girl team whose seductive, androgynous good looks mask a devious intelligence and deadly power. *Androids: Invincible* takes four episodes to show the three androids embarking on their journey to seek out the ailing Goku while the good guys rally and plan a counterattack.

The most interesting figure in this cycle is Dr. Gero, the aging mad-scientist-turned-android who creates the deadly androids. Given a highly dramatic design, he has far more malevolent character etched into his wrinkled visage (and extended mane of white hair) than any ten other anime villains and a surprising amount of fighting skill for an old man, even if he is now an android. However, he seriously underestimates his opponents and his own creations' capacity for betrayal and is forcibly evicted from the narrative way too soon. The two deceptively attractive young androids, A17 and A18, then take over as the chief opponents. The girl android has quite an effect on the frightened Krillin when, at the moment the two decide to spare him, she plants a kiss on his cheek, setting the stage for future developments.

The story takes a fanciful approach to time travel and manages to place grown-up Trunks and Baby Trunks together in the same scene. There are several helpful explanatory flashbacks but, more interestingly, there are flash *forwards* to the future from which Trunks has traveled, including a revealing conversation with his mother, an aged Bulma, about his father, Vegeta. Additionally, the settings are curiously inconsistent, with futuristic touches in some episodes but not in others. In the last two volumes, the androids travel through a western American 20th-century landscape in which the cars all have tires and run on gas and the cops wear ten-gallon hats, in contrast to the high-tech cityscapes seen elsewhere in the series.

Overall, the quality of the design and animation is as good or better as any in this series. Attention is also paid to plot and character, giving viewers a break from the pattern of wall-to-wall fighting that has occupied so much of this series. Still, anxious fans will have to await future episodes for some much-needed payoff. Selective fans seeking violent (uncut) action are best off with *Androids: Invasion*, which shows the first two androids attacking and laying waste to a city and beginning their fight with Goku and company. For plot and character, the choice would be *Androids: Assassins*, which introduces the two beautiful but deadly androids, A17 and A18, who waste little time in turning against their creator, Dr. Gero. Thank the Eternal Dragon that at least one father in this series, Goku, gets a little respect from his offspring.

Brian Camp

REVIEWS

BEST OF THE WEST

anime

WEST

MONUMENTAL OPERA, MONUMENTAL SCI-FI
HARLOCK SAGA
 VOL. 1: CLASH OF THE SPACE PIRATES



US Manga Corps • English VHS/Bilingual DVD • 90 mins. • US\$19.99 • USM
 2024 (VHS) • Based on the works of Leiji Matsumoto (*Galaxy Express 999*,
DNA Sights 999.9); suggested for ages 13 and up



© 1999 Leiji Matsumoto • Shinchousha/Bandai Visual • 81 Produce

Fans of Leiji Matsumoto will revel in the fact that anime's legends from the sea of stars are back in a brooding, dark series starring everybody's favorite cosmic swashbuckler, once again raising the famous skull-and-crossbones flag against those who dare suppress freedom. Newcomers will be impressed with the cosmic scope of this operatic tale, its beautiful animation, and the "cooler than a new tattoo" Captain Harlock and crew. Tall, slender women with a natural elegance and eyelashes Revlon girls would kill for maintain the endless rows of meters and dials making up the pirate ship's interior. Short, malformed little men with huge mouths and too many teeth scurry about applying their genius of mechanical engineering to repairing the complex machinery that makes Harlock's ship so formidable.

The story of *Harlock Saga* was inspired by Wagner's monumental opera *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, which also inspired for J.R.R. Tolkien's masterpiece series *The Lord of the Rings*. Both the anime and the opera have a villain named Alberich, or Albert. In the opera, Al seeks the golden ring that will give him the power to rule the universe. This ring is hidden in the Rhine River, guarded by three beautiful swimming maidens, who also show up in the anime as swimming priestesses. These priestesses are somehow connected to La Mime and are guardians of the mythical Rhine gold. This gold, of course, gives its owner the power to rule the universe and if taken from the planet, will cause the universe to sink into blackness.

The allure of Matsumoto is his ability to successfully recreate on a cosmic scale the sensations brought on by the emotional charge and drama found in opera. Overpowering emotional conflicts, tenderness, grandeur, passion, heroism, and tragedy are the core themes found in both the famed opera and throughout Matsumoto's work, and his larger-than-life characters are the perfect players to convey the powerful themes of Wagner's masterpiece. You'd think that science fiction and opera would be the last two things that would go well together, but they actually complement each other.

The animation has a baroque quality to it, intentionally suggested by the use of thick lines and deep hues of solid colors. The effect is like a stained-glass window and is perfect for the subject matter's heavy-handed themes. It's not often the art of an anime complements the story as well as this one does.

Matsumoto's usual character designs have been updated and given a more modern look without compromising the essence of the original, '70s-style look, to give some of the characters more human facial qualities. (Hardcore *otaku*, don't fret, because that really applies only to a few characters, like Maetel and Queen Emeraldas; others such as the 3-foot-tall bandito with the maroon cloak and matching hat are virtually unchanged, as are other wacky-doodle crewmembers of Harlock's ship.)

The computer-generated ship used in the first two episodes is pretty hard on the eyes, but that pathetic-looking green bean is scrapped by the third, and we are treated to a tastefully animated version from there on out. The English dubbing is mildly annoying—not terrible, just boring, due to lackluster performances. In his English rendition, Captain Harlock sounds like a substitute captain filling in for the real one for one day, but luckily, he doesn't actually appear much in this volume—it's his saga, but he's more like a guest star.

If you have never seen any of Matsumoto's movies and are worried about being lost in the rich histories spanning three decades, don't be—a large part of this series' allure is the mysterious nature of its characters, so knowing the history and background of Harlock isn't necessary for enjoying this anime. But if you're curious, as far as I can tell, this story takes place before the *Galaxy Express* movies, because the three main characters are still together, and in *Galaxy Express*, they have been split up and live on different worlds.

Harlock Saga is another credit to the creative powers of a man who brought anime to new emotional heights, moving audiences with stories steeped in classic opera, one of the highest forms of culture. The result is anime with a unique style that can only be Leiji Matsumoto. The destruction of living feeling planets, the passage of youth and innocence, the isolation and sorrow of trapped souls, and the beauty and nobility of risking all for one's dreams are as moving today as they were 20 years ago.

Dr. Brown



PIRATE PROTECTION FOR PENNIES
ANGEL LINKS
 VOL. 1



Bandai • Bilingual DVD • 75 mins. • US\$29.98 • 0985 • Farmer John sez, "They don't grow 'em that big no more." Spun off from the world of *Outlaw Star*

I've heard of overachievers, but wow... Meifon Li has quite the burden to uphold. On his deathbed, Meifon's grandfather granted her an incredible inheritance on the condition that she uses it to fund a free-of-charge security service for traders in the Orihalcon star system. Now, as head of one of the largest security forces in the galaxy and captain of the powerful cruiser *Angel Links*, 16-year-old Meifon and her loyal crew take any job deemed noble enough for their involvement.

This anime is based on Hideaki Ibuki's novel *Guardian Force Angel Links*, but you may also have seen these fellows in *Outlaw Star* (episode 19, "Law and Lawlessness"), when the Angel Links Group actually captures Gene Starwind and friends while grappling with pirates. Although the agency has many ships to call on in a battle, Meifon's preference is to command her personal supership *Angel Links*, in almost every escort duty and tour of battle the group is hired for.

How powerful is the *Angel Links*? Bristling with artillery, anti-aircraft guns, and a complement of fighters, this baby would give a Star Destroyer a run for its money! The centerpiece of the *Angel Links*' arsenal, though, is her main gun, the Links Cannon, which is very much like the main gun on the *Macross*—it destroys everything in its path. How can measly pirates stand up to this insane starship? I was wondering the same thing.

I've got no real beef against *Angel Links*, it certainly has its nail-biting moments and seems to be building to something plotwise, but I have to admit most aspects were pretty far below my expectations. Having come off a binge of the entire *Outlaw Star* series just the week before, I was hoping for the knock-

down-drag-out-space-dogfight-grappler scenes that I really enjoyed to be in its spin-off companion. What I've seen so far, though, is a stale, starship-scale take-off of *Sailor Moon*. *Angel Links* gets battered. *Angel Links* regains composure. *Angel Links* fires Links Cannon. Enemy is no more. Now that is anticlimactic. Furthermore, Meifon herself—a 16-year-old girl, let me restate—is a distraction to the story, to say the least. With cha-chas large enough to make Mai Shiranui blush, let me tell you, it doesn't rain fan service here folks, it pours. Are these just first-volume jitters, or is this in fact the true face of *Angel Links*? I've got hope for this series so I'll keep my mind open and my eyes peeled.

FEATURES: If the *Wings of Honneamise* DVD is a lush, tropical rainforest, then *Angel Links Vol. 1* DVD is the Gobi Desert. You might find a camel if you look hard, but don't press your luck. With only three episodes per DVD, even extras are sparse. These include the standard language selections, trailers, and a textless

opening theme that is really, in my opinion, way too magical-girl-like for a quasi-space opera like this (or is it?). Honestly, the dub is decent and downright entertaining at times, with almost all the characters sounding within the bounds of good taste and even using a liberal amount of American slang and pop-culture references, which as a whole is something I didn't expect. Visuals and sound, I am happy to say, are very sharp (it's just the effects that are questionable), and both are equal to those of any other quality DVD on the market. I wish the same could be said about the plot, but until another volume comes around and hopefully begins the process of redemption, I can't recommend *Angel Links Vol. 1* DVD as anime dollars well spent.

Matthew Lopez



© Morning Star • Sunrise

OUTSIDE TIME DOESN'T MEAN OUTSIDE FATE
TRIGUN
 VOL. 7: PUPPET MASTER

Pioneer • English VHS/Bilingual DVD • 75 mins. • US\$24.98/\$29.98 • XXXX • Vash and the gang enter the home stretch, but it's a tough ride ahead

Despite being blamed for a lot of mayhem that wasn't technically his fault, Vash the Stampede has managed to stay out of harm's way. Accompanied by two insurance investigators and a gun-toting priest, he roams the land at will. However, wherever he goes, trouble seems to follow. Things are bound to get even worse, though, since his true archenemy, the cruel and malicious Knives, seems intent on doing away with Vash for good.

For Vash, home is a piece of a colonization ship that refuses to crash (shades of *Eat-Man's* Lavion). It is populated by peaceful, isolated people who believe that they have nothing to worry about. This belief proves to be misguided, however. Shortly after Vash arrives (with Wolfwood in tow), three of Lagato's Gung-Ho Gun assassins show up. The battle is long and violent, and the casualties heavy.

The battle has a severe effect on Vash. His inability to kill his enemies and save his friends causes him to

realize that he must keep moving before he puts innocent people at risk. However, he can't resist helping out some orphans, and he soon finds himself back to "normal." It isn't long, however, before tragedy strikes again. One of the orphans is actually a Gung-Ho Gun. When things get ugly, Wolfwood takes a rather pragmatic approach to the problem, killing the kid. Needless to say, this creates a rift between Wolfwood and the others, especially Vash.

There is no easy way to describe these three episodes. The strange juxtaposition of old-school Vash slapstick and emotionally heavy battles creates an incredibly odd sensation. The series has clearly changed in tone, but in so doing, it lets us see a lot more of who the characters are and why they do what they do. We are even given a clue as to how Vash relates to the "Plants"—both seem to live "outside of time."

One strength of this tape is the way in which Vash's refusal to kill is dealt with. In many ways, he is similar to "Rurouni" Kenshin—a killing machine with a pacifist's heart. However, Vash is learning the hard way that sometimes you have to live by the law of the jungle, no matter how much you dislike it.

For fans of the series, this tape is a must-have. Even if you're a new fan, however, you should still be able to watch this volume and get a feel for what's going on. Just be warned: *Trigun* lulls you with comedy one minute and then kicks you in the gut with a steel-toed boot the next. All I can say is that my stomach hurts, and the pain is good.

Adam Rehorn

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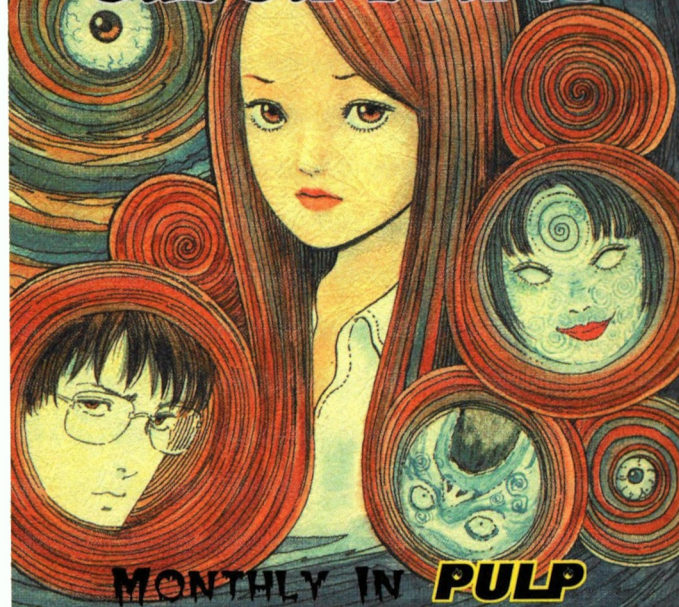
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AV



Dr. Brown's

Game Crisis

FIST OF THE NORTH STAR

System: PlayStation 1
Type: 3D Action/Fighter
Developer/Publisher: Bandai
Available: Import
Price: US\$49

I've been promising coverage of this game for the last three months, and up until now, my pants were smoking and threatening to spontaneously combust, but they didn't, because here it is—the **Fist of the North Star** video game for your PlayStation 1! This game rocked Japan and shot right to the No. 1 spot, outselling every other game and showing up the PlayStation 1's big black sister, the PS2. So now that I've finally got the **Fist of the North Star** game and now that I've spent some serious time with it, the question comes to mind—Is it as good as the anticipation? Hell, yeah! and Hell, no! I love this game, but it has some serious flaws—I'll get to those later. The good stuff first: This game is like an action comic book. You simply control the fighting, and after each fight, there is a lengthy scene taken directly from the manga. That sounds cool, but American fans of the **Fist** manga got to see only a fraction of the entire story. Volumes of manga may never be translated into English due to lack of readership/interest in the series. The anime movie is somewhat of disappointment because it tried to condense a massive amount of story into a two-hour movie. But the game is a fan's dream come true, and will rock your postapocalyptic world as it follows Kenshiro's mad trek through a barren, charred Earth where musclebound steroid-stuffed punk rockers from hell try to hack up the few remaining decent folk left.

Where there's **Fist**, there's bound to be blood, and although in the game, it flows by the gallon, to be honest, it looks a little toned down from the anime. Bodies explode but it is just a lot of blood, whereas in the anime, you could clearly see the intestines of enemies burst from the enormous holes punched in their bodies. There are no close-ups of the electrical sparks racing through swollen brains in the last few seconds before heads expand and burst in a psychedelic blast of blood with a "blorsh" sound and two surprised eyeballs launching separate ways. The lack of visibly detailed body parts could also be a limitation of the PlayStation 1, as its limitations become more and more apparent with each passing day. If you don't know the story of Kenshiro, "the man with seven wounds," this game is like playing a really bloody version of **Bouncer** with PlayStation 1 graphics.

The game plays much like the manga reads. You control Ken traveling from one area to the next beating up bad guys who look like mentally ill **Road Warrior** extras. It's a fight-then-watch (if you're a fan) or fight-then-wait (if you're not) through moderately long, nonskippable (only for the first time) cut scenes that come straight from the original manga. No doubt this will titillate fans of this incredibly popular series (at least in Japan it's incredibly popular) as they not only get to watch their favorite **Fist** in action, but they also get to join in. Nonfans will at least get a kick out of the variety of deranged villains with muscles upon muscles. Not to mention the best damn battle cry ever! *Ahh-ya-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ahhhhhhh!!!!!!* Just about everybody from the manga shows up, as the game is really long, and if you're not a fan, it can get really tedious, as the gameplay is severely limited to fighting enemies and occasionally running.

This wouldn't be so bad if you had more than a handful of moves to use in your arsenal. Fighting games can be really fun, but when you have only five or six moves, it's not quite as fun as it should be. Then there's the somewhat-

crude combat system combined with the questionable music and the fact that often, after a victory, the next cut scene you get to watch is the guy you've just spent 20 minutes beating crippling your character, and you can't do a dang thing about it. Why did you just spend so much time beating that fool, just to watch him end up winning anyway? Where is the logic in that? (If it happened once or twice, I could chalk it up to sloppy writing, but when it happens every third fight or so, it begins to seem a little silly.)

To be honest, I dig this game, but it is based on my favorite anime, so I'm biased. My inner Brown sense tells me not to recommend it to nonfans as the long, unimpressive cut scenes are too frequent, and if you don't really like **Fist of the North Star**, you will be severely annoyed the first time through. The fighting is far too shallow, but it's still a lot of fun watching the looks on the faces of the crazed-killer punk rockers as they bloat up and explode.

Another reason to pick this one up is the Versus mode—you and a friend can play against each other. Yes, you can play the obese bodyguard who was immortalized in the English-dubbed movie when Kenshiro hits him with his death blow and says, "Say your good-byes lard ass, because you're already dead!" punctuated by the anaconda-sized intestines that burst up into the air from his entire enormous gut exploding.

If you're looking for depth, you will not find it here. If you're looking for new and exciting ways to watch dirty maniacs spasm uncontrollably moments before exploding into red geysers of flesh and blood, then you will find them in this import **Fist of the North Star** game!

NEXT MONTH: E3 will be officially "Browned" again. The console wars showdown, X-Box, PlayStation 2, Game Cube, all head-to-head for a triple threat match. I'll tell you exactly what happened, who did it, and how much did it hurt. Stay Brown, stay down, and I'll hook up with you next month. ★

MY-T ANIME GAME RATINGS:



Rating:
Fans



Rating:
Nonfans





AV

FIST OF THE NORTH STAR TYPING GAME

System: Windows PC or Mac
Type: Typing
Developer/Publisher: SSI Tristar
Available: Import
Price: US\$42

I can honestly say that I wrote this little piece about a whack typing game faster than usual. That's because I've been spending an hour a day practicing my typing with the *Fist of the North Star* typing game.

Now, if you've played one typing game you can probably guess how this game works. If you haven't, lemme 'splain somp'n....

There are words. They are made up of letters. These letters have been placed in a certain order on a keyboard. Every letter or number can be pushed by one of your ten fingers, so long as they are kept in the correct position, known as "home row" to typing enthusiasts (if there are any), with wrists raised approximately one inch from the surface of the desk. If you've taken a typing class, you might do all right at this game—that is, if you've kept in practice. If you haven't and are accustomed to hunting and pecking for your letters, it's unlikely you'll ever make it past the third or fourth level.

The levels feature characters from the movie and manga and become progressively more difficult, starting with lowly, no-name punks; going through some of the major characters, like Shin; and finally ending with Raoh the Conqueror. He's the final boss and is tougher than ever, armed to the teeth with outrageous words around 20 letters long and sometimes with numbers mixed in. These words are in *kanji* and (if you have Japanese language support on your computer) must be typed without mistakes in the span of about eight seconds. If you can type fast enough without mistakes, eventually you charge up your death blow attack and win. (I have never actually done this, although I witnessed Trish Ledoux beat him with lightning-fast keystrokes and no time for foolish errors.)

The characters you type against are still images in color against a blurred background. The effect is simple and attractive. (Well, as attractive as the gnarled punk rockers from a postapocalyptic future can be.) The charm of this game is incredible, with sound effects and battle-attack shouts. On the later levels, every keystroke is accompanied by a single syllable of Kenshiro's famous mind-blowing rapid-fire punching attacks. So if you type really fast, you'll hear his scream "Ahhhh-tah-tah-tah-tah-tah-tah!!!!!" followed by the nice and juicy sounds of bone-breaking and muscle tissue being ripped apart from the inside out. The slightly disturbing sounds of gurgling sloshes from agitated intestines preparing to escape the flesh prison they have lived in might give the willies to anyone squeamish, and if that doesn't, the sight of their bodies exploding will, with individual organs and bones clearly visible amidst the bright-red splat where a man once stood—a man who was foolish enough to challenge your vengeful fingers. A mistake he never makes twice!

The good news is, the game works on a Windows PC or a Mac and downloading the Japanese language kit is easy. Actually, you don't even need one, since the words are spelled out in easy-to-read English letters below the *kanji*. The bad news is, it's an older game, having come out from SSI Tristar way back in 1999, so finding it will be a challenge to say the least. Try eBay, anime conventions, or obscure Japanese toy/model shops. Good luck.

Dr. Brown



Special thanks to George and Rika for *Fist* info and for the typing game. **Wa-ta!**

Rating:





AV

CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

System: N64
Type: Action/Platformer
Developer: Rare
Publisher: Nintendo
Available: Domestic U.S.
Price: US\$60
Rated: M for Mature



What makes this game so different from other 3D platformers? Is it the mountain of poo level that towers above a poo factory? Maybe it's the drunken-squirrel level, where our hero has to urinate on red-hot devils before they burn him alive? Perhaps the exciting poo opera where the poo monster sings his poo song and hurls poo at you while you dodge try to lob giant rolls of toilet paper in his mouth. The list of gross oddities goes on for days. *Conker's Bad Fur Day* is quite a disgusting game that's a mixture of fun and frustration.

A game with such lowbrow, bottom-of-the-heap, sixth-grade humor should feature the same caliber of gameplay, but that's not the case—this is a difficult game. The level goals rarely follow any kind of rational logic. For instance, at one level, you must find a way to make a cow poo. (Poo plays a major part in this game, if you haven't noticed.) So, you must first trick the bull into charging a target, which will release a cow who grazes nearby. Hop onto his back for a quick ride and charge the grazing cow, which then makes her thirsty (?), and she runs over for a quick drink of prune juice. While she is unleashing down a drainpipe, Conker hops onto the bull and charges the cow, smashing her to bloody pieces. A different target pops out, and you repeat the process a total of three times, resulting in the bull standing on a metal grate wishing he wasn't such a fat bastard, and then he falls through a giant hole into the brown water below. Where is the logic there? Bull charges cow, cow gets thirsty? The game is extremely contrived at times, and getting through the whole thing without consulting an online walkthrough or buying a guidebook doesn't seem likely. A sign of an intelligently programmed game is that when you play it, the next goal is clearly defined and easily understood. The challenge should never be trying to figure out what to do next.

The humor of *CBFD* caters to a trailer-trash mentality, and I found many of the jokes wearing

thin long before they were over. This is a surprise move for Nintendo, which up to now has been associated with games safe for children. With more adults playing video games, it looks like Nintendo is trying a bit too hard to show the world its games are no longer just for kids. Of course, people will love this game and say nothing ill of it, but I don't think poo jokes

are that funny. Maybe occasionally they can be funny, but an entire *level* devoted to the subject (complete with a huge mountain of it) is a bit much.

So the game is not perfect, but in terms of graphics, *Bad Fur Day* is far above the rest of the N64 library. Nice use of lighting, brilliant colors, a variety of textures, bouncy cartoony movement, cool effects, and humorously designed characters make this probably the best-looking game for the system.

In play terms, I was expecting a cheap gimmick game with little in the way of actual gameplay, but what I found was not what I expected. Strip away the nasty English humor, and beneath lies a solid platformer with the usual enticing odds and ends that have made Rare one of the best platform game developers in the world. Expect great graphics, innovative gameplay, outstanding music, and a thoroughly engaging experience. In *CBFD*, the good is great and the bad is terrible as we also get a strong

taste of the problems associated with Rare's games, like awkward if not frustrating camera during certain levels (prone to disabling first-person view during times when you really need it, such as to see the slim ledge you're supposed to leap onto), inappropriate difficulty, vague level goals, and sloppy control compared to the tighter control of some of their earlier games like *Banjo Kazooie*.

In spite of all this, I still recommend the game. If you enjoy *South Park*'s "poo is funny" humor, you will have a blast. If you don't laugh and make a corny joke every time you fart, you might want to rent it before buying.

Dr. Brown

Rating:



CD



MARIO STORY ORIGINAL SOUNDTRACK

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Koji Kondo (composer of the *Super Mario* and *Zelda* series, among many others) may not have been involved with the *Mario Story* ("Paper Mario" in the U.S.) soundtrack, but all 78 musical numbers are classic *Mario*, through and through. Composer Yuka Tsujiyoko started with bits and pieces of earlier *Mario* music and expanded on them to create this; the opening strains of the title music come straight from the main theme of *Super Mario World*, the first few notes of the *Super Mario Bros. Underworld* theme are scattered throughout the dungeon music, and the Hammer Brothers theme from *Super Mario Bros. 3* shows up underneath the theme of the "Koopa Bros."

One of the more inventive parts of the game, musically, is that when you enter different buildings in Toad Town, a new counter-melody is laid over the main town music. Track 22 on the first disc features all these in sequence, and it really lets you appreciate this interesting idea. The only track that I couldn't find on either disc was the *Super Mario World* ending music, which you can listen to on a radio within the game. The original *Super Mario Bros.* theme is, however, on Disc 1.

It's a little difficult to sit down and listen to *Mario Story OST* all the way through, since not only is it two and a half hours long, many of the tracks are similar, and many of them are only so-so. It's done well, though, and if you like *Mario* music, you'll definitely want to hunt this one down for the standout pieces.

Chris Kohler



AV

PAPER MARIO

System: Nintendo 64
Type: RPG
Developer/Publisher:
 Nintendo/Intelligent Systems
Available: Domestic U.S.
Price: US\$49.99

Nintendo either has amazingly strict quality control or a twisted sense of humor because it just loves to announce and preview games four or five years before they come out. Recent cases in point: *Kirby 64*, *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, and *Paper Mario*. Earlier in its life, *PM* was known as "Super Mario RPG 2," but, perhaps because Nintendo wanted to distance this game from its predecessor, the name was changed. It was probably a good idea, because *PM* bears little resemblance to the original—or, for that matter, many other RPGs.

The first thing you'll notice are the unique graphics, with characters that look like paper cutouts imposed on full 3D backgrounds. This is probably appropriate for the N64, a system whose raw polygon processing power is notoriously low anyway. Stylistically, it is done well. The characters all look like cute little drawings in a pop-up picture book, and their emotions and facial expressions are all animated nicely. My only quibble with the paper motif is that it has little to do with the rest of the game; replace the graphics with a standard 3D look and none of the gameplay would seem out of place.

Not that *PM*'s gameplay is "standard" by any means. For starters, during battle you use only Mario and one partner, like Goombario, Kooper, Bombette, etc. (In case you're wondering, your partners are explained as being monsters that are no longer loyal to Koopa. Or some such.) Your main powerhouse is Mario, of course, since he has all the attacks, magic spells, and items. Key to battling is not only strategy but also timing. You must use timed button presses and joystick movements in battle to maximize the effect of attacks. This was one of the best features in the original, and it's nice

to see it not only back but improved on.

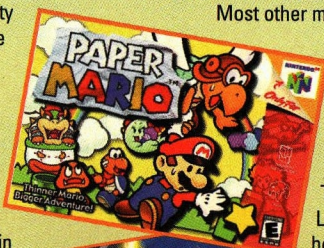
Most other major *Mario* characters (excluding, thank goodness, the god-awful original characters from *Super Mario RPG*) make appearances. The long-neglected Luigi has to stay at home during Mario's adventure, but you can go there and talk to him throughout the game. Princess Toadstool, appropriately, has been kidnapped by Bowser, but she still makes herself useful by sneaking around the castle *Metal Gear Solid*-style (under your control, of course) to find helpful items.

To its credit, *Paper Mario* clocks in at a respectable 25-30 hours. As you might imagine, *Paper Mario*'s story is not deep and the game itself is not difficult, but it never fails to be fun. Credit must also be given to Nintendo of America for its well-written, inventive, and sometimes side-splittingly funny translation. If Luigi's sarcastic comments don't get you, the couple by the lake in Toad Town will. If only the company had the chance to translate more RPGs.

My only real issue lies with the game's ESRB rating. Although it is rated "E" for "Everyone," there are numerous scenes of human-animal violence. Specifically, I fear that *Paper Mario* may inspire children to go outside and hit turtles with sledgehammers to see them explode. It then takes days to get their clothes clean afterwards. I encourage all N64 owners to check out *Paper Mario*, but please... play responsibly.

Chris Kohler

Rating:

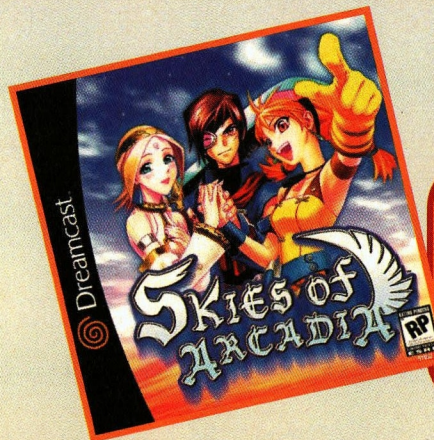


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AV

SKIES OF ARCADIA

System: Dreamcast
Type: RPG
Developer/Publisher:
 Sega
Available: Domestic U.S.;
 in Japan as "Eternal
 Arcadia")
Price: US\$49.99



As the next generation of video game systems advances 3D graphics further and further, many designers are striving for ever-increasing degrees of photorealism. On the other hand, what I would personally like to see are 3D worlds realized in anime style, with smooth, cartoonlike characters. So far, one of the only developers to attempt this has been Sega, both with the "cel-shaded" skateboarder *Jet Grind Radio* and now with *Skies of Arcadia*, a traditional RPG. In the history of the company, Sega has turned out comparatively few RPGs, but each of them has been in some way a high-water mark for the genre, and *Skies* is no exception.

RPG fans will find a lot to like about *Skies of Arcadia*, especially its unique premise. The world of *Skies* borrows quite a bit from the Age of Exploration, when brave sailors ventured out into the open seas in search of new lands and treasure. But there is one major difference: Rather than being covered with water, the sailors of Arcadia explore the vast, uncharted *skies*, flying from continent to continent in their airships. While the world of Arcadia is entirely fictional, impose the game's map over a map of the Earth, and you'll see many similarities: the main characters live in the "center" of the world and have European names like Raimrez and Gregorio; to the west, where the Americas would be, live primitive jungle-dwelling peoples; and when you explore further east, you find a country with an amalgam of Japanese and Chinese culture. But, as is par for the course with epic RPGs, all is not as it seems. Skirmishes between your band of air pirates and the evil empire quickly turn into a battle for the future of the world versus a mysterious supernatural power. Of course.

But to *Skies*' credit, the story never becomes random or out of control; it is a well-written (and well-translated) typical Japanese "coming-of-age" story featuring our dashing young pirate hero and his trusty female sidekicks. And although character *development* is virtually nil, the characters themselves are likable, and although it is left to the player's imagination as to which female sidekick becomes the hero's "special" friend, you'll definitely have a favorite before the game is over.

As I touched on above, *Skies*' graphics deserve special mention, and not only for their cartoonish look. Put simply, *Skies of Arcadia* is one of the best-looking RPGs ever. Words like "jaw-dropping" and "mind-blowing" don't even begin to do justice to *Skies*' lush environments and diverse localities. One minute you might be running around uninhabited misty ruins in the middle of a jungle and the next touring a bustling city, but wherever you





TOY

are, the level of detail is simply astounding. The characters, too, have a wide variety of well-drawn and amusing facial expressions. There is no FMV, because *Skies* does not need it. As for sound, the English voice-effects are decent and the music is quite good.

Where *Skies* loses a point, then, is in the battles. First off, random battles happen far too frequently, which cuts drastically into the enjoyment of exploring new lands. Battles themselves are turn-based and usually too long, a little boring, and rather non-strategic. Every now and then, you fight with your ship against other ships, but these battles too rely less on strategy and more on just plugging away at your opponent from round to round. Furthermore, these ship battles, rather than being an exciting change of pace, are usually even more interminably long and boring than hand-to-hand combat.

After Sega's brilliant *Panzer Dragoon Saga* on the Saturn, it's nice to see it have another go at the genre. But while it succeeded yet again at creating a rich audiovisual experience with decent characters and an interesting story, *Skies*' battles make me long for *PDS* fast, gripping action. It's not too much of a problem, though; so if you're looking for a 128-bit RPG, keep *Skies of Arcadia* in mind.

Chris Kohler

Rating:



Toy Boy illustration by James Boren

Patrick Macias'

TOY FAIR

The events of February 2001, specifically those relating to the American International Toy Fair trade show in New York City, continue to haunt my dreams and waking hours. Sometimes, I'll jolt up in the middle of the night and reach instinctively for a crucial press badge that isn't there, or someone will mention "hot property" and "must-have" plush toy Mr. Winkle (go now, if you dare, to www.mrwinkle.com), and I'll flash back to the bit when I was trapped in a showroom surrounded by Stepford Wives-like PR agents acting as high priestesses in the dubious service of "the cutest dog in the universe."

Okay, so Toy Fair wasn't all trauma and soul-devouring spectacle. But a lot of it was. Clearly, I'm still trying to come to terms with the experience. And whenever the memory of it all gets to be too much, I often like to think of all the fine generally and specifically Japanese-related products to be seen there. In a universe lord-

ed over by the likes of Mr. Winkle and action figures branded tiresome "extreme" sports images, the Japanese stuff always came with an extra, welcome touch of class and charm.

Take for instance Alfrex Co. Ltd, which came all the way from Shinjuku, Tokyo to showcase its "Forever Lasting Samurai Figures" series to a tragically disinterested crowd. In a spectacular display of *otaku*-ness, the Alfrex guys are using an exclusive nylon resin figure "based on the Japanese body" (built so it can actually convincingly bow and kneel! Honest!) to make their versions of Lone Wolf and Cub, Yojimbo, Sonny Chiba,

and all seven of Akira Kurosawa's Seven Samurai soar. Maybe 1/6 action figures of Japanese movie stars like Tomisaburo Wakayama and Shintaro Katsu in the samurai roles that made them great aren't as "hot" now as *Harry Potter* movie tie-ins and *Jurassic Park 3* figures, but guess what's destined to wind up in the discount bin first?

Back in the states, Palisades Toys is heavily playing up a Japanese video game angle in its

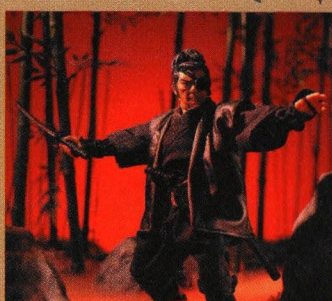
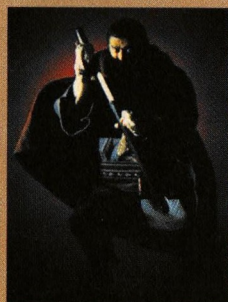
TALES FROM
TOY FAIR
THE FINAL CHAPTER

2001 catalog, which lists copious numbers of *Resident Evil* action figures, including a splatter-riffic 12" Zombie Cop right out of a muck-encrusted Lucio Fulci movie. As if to counter all the blood and bullets, the *Space Channel 5* chicks get their own line as well, standing tall in those truly, truly, truly outrageous platform boots. The upcoming *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* all-CGI movie means an avalanche of products from the franchise as well, including a Vivi Orunitia vinyl statue that will win over *Masters of the Universe* fans until someone makes an "official" version of Vivi look-alike Orko. Who buys all those pricey, but oh-so lovingly detailed resin busts? Someone out there apparently, since Palisades is

also doing head-and-shoulders versions of Vash and Wolfwood from *Trigun*, as well as a trio of *Tenchi* characters, a host of *Dragon Ball Z* dudes, an Armitage III and even (gasp!) Nurse Nanako! And last but not least, the anime lunchbox series is certainly worth mentioning, not only because of the tremendous hipster cache potential in owning a *Lain*, *Tenchi*, or *Trigun* pail but also because, whereas lunchboxes today are mostly made out of plastic or cloth (Cloth! Ha!), Palisades is using old-school metal.

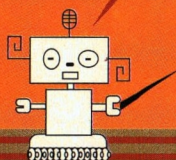
The Torrance-based Animerix company is throwing down the gauntlet to the likes of the "cutest dog in the universe" with an entire envelope-pushing line of *Tenchi Muyo!*'s famed cabbit, Ryo-Ohki, and her lesser known cabbit compadre, Ken-Ohki. Not content with a mere "plush doll" incarnation, it is also making backpacks, beanies, coin purses, and big, giant Ohki slippers! Oh my!

Here's to you Animerix, Palisades, and Alfrex for offering a sane alternative in an insane world. For being a glass of cool sparkling spring water amongst rivers of luke-warm Safeway Select Grape Soda. And partially owing to these cozy cabbit slippers, I think I'm feeling better already. ★

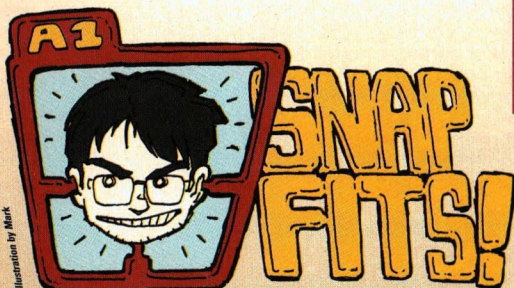


REVIEWS

MEEP Please observe the rating system



KIT



with Mark Simmons

When it comes to model robots, 1/144 has always been my favorite scale. I should hasten to add that, given the range of giant-robot dimensions, this is a pretty meaningless statement; the ubiquitous armored trooper Scopedog of Votoms fame would be a miniscule one inch tall in this scale, while a 1/144 Ideon would stand a towering two feet and change (they don't call it a "legendary god-giant" for nothing!). But for the 'bots of *Mobile Suit Gundam*, this scale yields a nice five-inch model kit—large enough to be detailed and poseable, yet small enough to fit on your shelf and within your impulse-buying budget.

For 1/144 scale devotees like yours truly, Bandai's ongoing High Grade Universal Century series is a dream come true. Launched in 1999, the HG-UC line applies modern model-kit technology to classic mobile suit designs from the original *Gundam* series and some of its first sequels. Although relatively cheap—US\$10 to \$30, depending on which you buy and where you shop—and simple to construct, these fully detailed and articulated critters are like miniature Master Grade kits. And, unlike the *Gundam*-dominated Master Grade lineup, the HG-UC series includes plenty of secondary mecha and bad guys.

Now, in tandem with Bandai's 2001 lineup of classic *Gundam* shows, these nifty model kits will be making their U.S. debut. This summer, Bandai America will roll out 1/144 scale "action figure model kits" based on the original *Mobile Suit Gundam* series, *The 08th MS Team*, *Gundam 0080*, and *Gundam 0083*. The original *Gundam* and *0083* lineups will be made up of shiny new HG-UC kits, including the Dom Tropen and Gundam GP01 Full Vernian, which were released in Japan last winter. The flagship of the line, of course, will be an all-new HG-UC version of the original RX-78 Gundam, a kit that is only releasing in Japan this May.

The other two series, meanwhile, will be represented by their original model kit lines. *The 08th MS Team* kits are of relatively recent manufacture, and are technologically similar to the HG-UC ones. *Gundam 0080*'s model kits, although produced 12 years ago, hold up surprisingly well; despite their somewhat squatty proportions, they're about as detailed and colorful as their modern descendants. It's kind of a shame the *0080* kits have aged so well—if they were as rotten as the original *Gundam* and *0083* model kit series, they'd probably have been retired in favor of slick HG-UC versions by now....

Having surveyed Bandai's Perfect Grade, Master Grade, and High Grade product lines in quick succession, it's time this column took a break from the *Gundam* franchise. Join us next time for a grab bag of model kits from the fantastic worlds of *The Big O*, *Virtual On*, and *Aura Battler Dunbine*!

TOY & MODEL KIT SCORECARD

ASSEMBLY: How challenging is it to build?

- 1: READY TO GO RIGHT OUT OF THE BOX
- 2: SNAP THE PARTS TOGETHER AND YOU'RE DONE
- 3: REQUIRES SCREWS, GLUE, OR OTHER EXTRA TRICKS
- 4: GLUE AND PAINT ARE MANDATORY

DETAILING: How complete and realistic is it?

- 1: BORING, FEATURELESS EXTERIOR
- 2: MODERATE AMOUNT OF DETAILING
- 3: PANEL LINES, FABRIC FOLDS, AND MORE
- 4: INVITES HOURS OF MAGNIFYING-GLASS SCRUTINY

PLAYABILITY: Can you pose it, change parts, add extra equipment?

- 1: NOTHING MORE THAN A DESK STATUE
- 2: MODEST MOVEMENT, FEW EXTRAS
- 3: FULLY ARTICULATED FIGURE WITH LOTS OF GADGETS
- 4: SUPERHUMAN POSEABILITY AND COUNTLESS GIMMICKS

1/144 SCALE HIGH GRADE UNIVERSAL CENTURY RX-78GP01FB GUNDAM GP01FB

From: Bandai
Price: ¥1,500
Overall height: 5"



ASSEMBLY	DETAILING	PLAYABILITY
2	3	3

Mark Sez: Even if you're tired of Gundams, this is a beautifully designed and super-poseable model. It comes with a bonus core fighter, too!

1/144 SCALE HIGH GRADE UNIVERSAL CENTURY MS-09F DOM TROPEN

From: Bandai
Price: ¥1,500
Overall height: 5"



ASSEMBLY	DETAILING	PLAYABILITY
2	3	3

Mark Sez: Although its only extras are a few clip-on bazooka magazines, I adore the Tropen's bulky proportions and striking color scheme.

1/144 SCALE MS-06FZ ZAKU FZ

From: Bandai
Price: ¥600
Overall height: 5"



ASSEMBLY	DETAILING	PLAYABILITY
2	2	3

Mark Sez: The Zaku FZ, probably the best of the *Gundam 0080* kits, is molded in full color and equipped with flexible cables and detailed joints. Pretty good for 1989!



Adam Rehorn's

MechWorks

CHOOSING THE PAINT! LIKE OIL AND WATER?!

Part II

Acrrylic paints are the water half of the oil-water paint spectrum. They are made from water-based pigments and are extremely easy to use. They require only normal tapwater for cleaning and can be thinned using the same thing. Acrylics are nontoxic, making them safer for younger modelers to use, and can be more easily cleaned up if spilled. If a spill dries, nail-polish remover will clean it up.

Acrylics have their own characteristics, all of which are more friendly than those of oils. They are easy to mix and have significantly longer shelf lives than oils. An acrylic paint can go "dormant" if not used for a long time. This means that the pigment settles to the bottom of the jar and a layer of solvent rises to the top. So long as the solvent doesn't dry up completely, then the paint can be revived at any time simply by stirring the two layers together. Usually the solvent is bluish or green in color, and you can add water to it at any time to "top it up" so the paint doesn't dry out completely. That having been said, however, it is impossible to use water to revive a completely dried-out acrylic. Special solvents are needed for that.

The greatest advantage of acrylics is that they dry *fast*! An acrylic-painted part has to be left for only 15 to 30 minutes before it can be repainted! Also, acrylics are "neutral," or "inert," meaning that they don't dissolve each other or any other type of paint. Thus, even if there is a slop of one color onto another, there won't be any disaster! Acrylics are also

tougher than oils and show dirt and fingerprints less. If you have oily skin (like yours truly), then you can actually "melt" your paint job just by handling it if you use oils. However, if you use acrylics, then you will just leave an oily fingerprint that can be washed off with a bit of water—a preferable situation, believe me.

Unfortunately, acrylics aren't without their drawbacks. They are more expensive than oils, although they can be "stretched" far more—a big jar of acrylic paint (29.5 mL) will often do for three to four kits, depending on the color. Also, acrylic metallics, except for Jet Exhaust, are impossibly useless, so don't even bother trying to use them.

Thankfully, acrylics are easier to mix than oils, and they are far less prone to separation. An acrylic color that is a mix may settle during painting a kit, but it will rarely change color during this time. If the color does change, usually all it takes is a vigorous stirring of the sediment to restore the original color. A major advantage of acrylics is that metallic colors can be mixed with non-metallics, so colors like Virsago Black are easy to make and maintain.

Next time, I'll start talking about the various colors you will need to successfully paint your mech kit. 'Till then! ★



This is a picture of my Korean Galient knockoff, a real tricky little kit. To make matters worse, it was done completely with oils and took over four times as long to complete as an equivalent kit done with acrylics. Long drying times and being self-dissolving are two hideous properties of oils.



This Leopard, from *Gundam X*, was done (like almost all my kits) with acrylics. The simple cleanup, chemical neutrality, and fast drying times of acrylics makes painting small kits like this one fun and easy.





HAJIME NO IPPO ("FIRST STEP")

2000 TV series based on the manga by Joji (George) Morikawa, serialized in *WEEKLY SHÖNEN MAGAZINE*, directed by Satoshi Nishimura (*Trigun*)

Get ready for another entry in one of Japan's most enduring tropes. A kid finds his calling, be it sports, sushi-making, or firefighting, and learns to give it his all. Here, Ippo learns that he's a natural boxer, with so much speed he can pluck leaves from the air. This proves his worth, grabbing a pebble from the master's hand did in *Kung Fu*. (At least he didn't have to chase a chicken, like in *Rocky 2*.) If that sounds familiar, try this—Ippo looks almost exactly like a grown-up version of *Pokémon*'s Ash, as if he'd outgrown catching cute monsters and decided to administer beatdowns instead.



© Joji Morikawa/Kodansha • Vap • NTV



OH MY GODDESS! THE MOVIE

2000 movie based on the manga created by Kosuke Fujishima

What is with these people? Keiichi is a nice guy to the point of being a drip, like heroes of this kind of Japanese fantasy story always are. This isn't my idea of a dream boyfriend—I'd walk all over him. Hearing this dude bleat "Belldandy!" every five seconds makes me appreciate creeps like *Urusei Yatsura*'s Ataru all the more—at least they're fun to watch. Belldandy herself is so placid and ladylike that she'd be a doormat as a regular girlfriend, never mind a goddess. They're supposed to be tugging at my heartstrings, but I wanted to slap 'em instead.



© Kosuke Fujishima/Kodansha © 2000 Aai Megami-sama Movie Production Committee

URIAN: Who would think something as exciting as boxing could be so boring? I nodded off a couple times and it was a struggle to keep my eyes open while my attention span was being mercilessly beaten down by the slow pace this show. Sometimes animation is easier to enjoy when you have read the manga and are already familiar with the characters. I think this is one of those shows that requires reading the manga to enjoy. Unfortunately none of it's been translated yet because no sports manga has really been dared in the States.



URIAN

RIO: It was bad enough I had to sit through *The Karate Kid* in my youth, so why did I have to sit through this foul rehash of it? *Hajime no Ippo* sucks, there's no way around it. If you challenged me to find an anime as predictable and slow as this one I'd be hard pressed to do so. After watching good stuff like *Ashita no Joe* and *Grappler Baki*, *Hajime no Ippo* just seems like pulling teeth. I'm not kidding about *The Karate Kid* line either, they both follow the exact same plot outline. Wax on, wax off.



RIO

WINNIE: Boxing? Whatever. While this show is implying that is has boxing, there's actually very little boxing. It's just like how most fruit juices really have, like, 5% real fruit juice. And as if that wasn't bad enough, *Hajime no Ippo* doesn't have much else going for it either. He goes to school. He moves boxes. Whoo-hoo. It's a good thing the bully started stomping his head in; at least there was some fighting then.

TRISH: Ippo, a "good boy" type who forsakes both friends and fun to help his struggling mom at the family Bait 'n' Tackle, gets a beatdown one day at the hands of some korrr-r-r-rya, korrr-r-r-rya punks and vows to "change his life" by taking up boxing. It's testament to the timeless appeal of the "underdog" story that, even if you have seen *Rocky*, still you find yourself kind of rooting for the kid. It's clichéd right down to the crusty mentor, sure, but then again, as Tyler Durden might say, on its way to becoming wood, even cookie dough starts with a first step.



WINNIE

URIAN: Wow. A two-hour struggle to stay awake as one unexciting event after another leads up a big climax where everybody gets ready to fight, then suddenly remembers the final episode of *Survivor* has started and goes home to watch it instead. Or something to that effect as we, the audience, are led to believe a big battle is coming up and get a lot of talking instead. This anime is a talker. It's all talk, with some wacky sidecar races. Even if I understood what they were talking about, I'm not sure if it would make a difference. Never seen the show, never want to after having seen the movie.

RIO: I've never seen the *Oh My Goddess!* anime or read the manga, but now I think I should check 'em out. First and foremost, the character designs are beautiful; Kosuke Fujishima is the man. Things move at a really slow pace and the movie's about 20 minutes too long, but there're always fantastic visuals to fall back on. I was also surprised to find a few good and original uses of computer graphics. There's even a 2001-esque psychedelic light show at one point. One more thing—I don't care what anyone else says, the motorcycle races in this movie look cool.



TRISH

WINNIE: I loved the *Oh My Goddess!* OAVs. However, the movie goes way off from the videos. It was romance-comedy before, but it's turned into a romance-drama-ish story that's not nearly as much fun as the original. I didn't hate it, but I didn't enjoy it so much either. The animation is beautiful and the goddesses are seen kicking butt for the first time, but a lot of the charm is lost. Everyone had to sit themselves down and get serious to figure out a way to cure Belldandy's amnesia. For a two-hour movie. I think *Oh My Goddess!* would be better suited to a TV series or another OAV series.

TRISH: After the interminable *You're Under Arrest!* movie I was expecting the worst, but there's an undeniable sweetness here that's both disarming and affecting...and I never expected to hear myself saying that. I enjoyed spending time with the characters again, and even if the plot did offer few surprises and the dialogue was filled with platitudes ("Believe in the future!"), the gorgeous animation and lush score more than made up for it. Cynical as I am (will these two ever do more than kiss?!), there'll always be a part of me that goes all gooshy and girly for true love.



MAI

NEXT:

Contributing editor and Iron Chef **Rio Yañez** has been addicted to Laurel K. Hamilton's "Anita Blake—Vampire Hunter" book series as of late and encourages all to check them out. Of course Rio's not only about reading, he recently danced Salsa to the point of almost passing out at a concert of Latin pop queen India. Now he's rested up and ready to dance again.

Dr. Brown fights his biggest battle ever against tobacco. After 16 years of smoking he has decided that smoking is illogical. Remembering back to when smoking was cool, he also remembers back to when pulling girls' hair was cool and since he has stopped doing that (almost stopped), he has decided to stop doing the other and will no longer be in a good mood. They say after the first few weeks it gets easier, but exactly who are "They" and what is "Their" agenda?

Thanks to the wonderful world of MP3s, Rio Yañez, and Dr. Brown, **Winnie Chow** has been sampling all kinds of music. While one of her current favorites is the Korean group S.E.S., but she admits that she's quickly becoming a fan of DJ Funk and MC Hawking (yes, as in Stephen Hawking). She can't get through the day now without hearing MC Hawking rapping. "Don't make me get out of this chair, I'll pop you like a zit."

Her heart still aflutter after watching the startlingly enjoyable **OMG!** movie (you can't possibly be more surprised than she is about it), **ANIMERICA** Founding Editor **T. Ledoux**—who once thought herself jaded beyond recovery—feels a renewed faith (however tentative) in her ability to find pleasure in shows she'd since written off. Maybe she should give **Plastic Little** or even **Wedding Peach** another try...? Mm, probably not.

ESCAFLOWNE: A GIRL IN GAEA • BLOOD, THE LAST VAMPIRE • EARTH GIRL ARJUNA • MEDAROT

URIAN: Everyone in this show is clearly jacked up on junk food as all the characters constantly go into a sugar-induced seizures and have sudden frantic attacks. This kind of liveliness would require the eating of many Twinkies and guzzling a six-pack of Jolt cola. Hyperactive maniacs going bananas every other minute is a welcome change after being subjected to bland boxing and *Oh My Goddess!* The animation is entertaining and the characters seem like a strange mixture of *Fat Albert* and *Masters of the Universe*. Special bonuses are the incredibly funny fight scenes with oddball characters and racially insensitive super stereotypes.

RIO: I can see why the *One Piece* manga is so popular in Japan, it's crazy! The main character of this high-energy movie takes Plastic-Man and Mr. Fantastic to school when it comes to stretching powers. Part high-seas adventure and part slapstick comedy, *One Piece* actually had me rolling around with laughter and exclaiming "that's cool" whenever there was an action sequence. The exaggerated character designs fit everything so perfectly and elevate the comedy to another level. The final battle of the film looks better than anything I've ever seen in *Dragon Ball Z* and twice as funny. Run out and see *One Piece* now.

WINNIE: There are some words that I just can't say here, but instead I'll say *holy shiznit!* I can only hope to be this wired someday, and that would involve hooking caffeine directly to my veins. There're some wild, wild, events going down in *One Piece*. I mean, the stretchy kid takes a bullet in the forehead and springs back in less than five seconds. This has to be one of the most entertaining East shows I've watched in a while. I'm not sure how else to say it, but I'm really, really, in love with *One Piece*.

TRISH: The "wack factor" alone kept me watching (what did he mean, *gomu ningen?*), but around the second reel my attention must have drifted. I know this, because when a quiz at the end asked me to identify a character name, I drew a blank. Essentially *Legend of El Dorado* sans Branaugh or Kline, *One Piece*—and still I have no idea what that means—uses wacky gags in place of the Elton John songs and, for the most part, is the better for it. I wouldn't buy it on DVD, but if my four-year-old niece wanted to watch it, I might let her.

URIAN: Who ever heard of two giant robots fighting over a *Getter Robo* title that don't exist? There are very few people who don't enjoy watching giant robots knocking over skyscrapers and tearing up the town. These few individuals who don't like it probably don't like anything good and watch the Weather Channel compulsively. For the rest of us, it's always big fun watching massive metal giants demolishing crowded cities, one computer-enhanced special attack at a time. The name of this anime is a bit confusing because *shin* in Japanese is "new" (even though the *kanji* used here means "true"), and *neo* also means "new," so the title sounds like "New Getter Robo vs. New Getter Robo." Wacky robot warfare with a neo-retro feel.

RIO: Old-fashioned robot action! As a relatively new pupil in the wonderful world of giant robots I got a kick out of this one. Usually the giant atomic explosion occurs at the end of an anime but *Shin Getta Robo vs. Neo Getta Robo* has one in its first battle. I was a little disappointed that we didn't see any Getta Robo on Getta Robo violence in the first episode, but there was still plenty of vintage robot mayhem to go around. Maybe it was the semi-old-school character designs, but I got a great feeling like I was a kid watching Saturday morning cartoons with this one.

WINNIE: I'm all for giant robots smacking the hell out of anything and everything. But there needs to be something to fill the gap between fighting. Since here it's gambling and brawling for cash, I'm liking *Shin Getter Robo vs. Neo Getter Robo* that much more. Now if only some of the action would transfer to *Hajime no Ippo*....

TRISH: As a former fan of historical romances, one of my big realizations back then was that "formula" or genre novels have their rules for a reason. Part of why we like them is that they always deliver on the promised payoff. In bodice rippers heroines always "get together" with their beloveds; in sports drama, there's always a big comeback scene; and in giant robot shows, the evil robot somehow always survive to fight another day. *Getter Robo*, with its off-the-walls energy and by-the-book plot turns, is just such a "genre" show...and you know, that's a good thing.



ONE PIECE

2000 movie (and TV series); based on the manga by Eiichiro Oda serialized in SHŌNEN JUMP

The bulging eyes, the rubbery limbs, the Huckleberry Finn-style straw hat! *One Piece* is nothing if not interesting to look at, and like a video game, each character has his own weird, signature look so you can easily tell them apart. You get everything from a cigarette-smoking lounge lizard to a Pinocchio-nose, do-rag clad, overalls-wearing freakazoid. On top of this, there are wacky martial arts the likes of which I haven't seen since *Ninku*, freaky pirate ships (love the grinning skull pirate flag), and yet another it-reminds-me-of-*Pokémon* moment in the opening credits with swimming sea monsters. Rad!

© Eiichiro Oda/Shueisha



SHIN GETTER ROBO VS. NEO GETTER ROBO

2000-01 OAV series based on the characters created by Go Nagai and Ken Ishikawa; character and mecha designs by Fujio Suzuki

I guess I have to be brief here because the show's title is so darn long, but suffice it to say that if you ranked robots by sheer coolness factor, the Getter 1 would surely be the coolest robot of all time. (No. 2 would be Giant Robo and No. 3 being the Gaogaigar.) It's the cape, man, it's gotta be the cape!

© 2000 Go Nagai • Ken Ishikawa/Dynamic Planning • Saotome Research Lab



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FOR THE RECORD

We take pride in being the best-researched anime magazine in America...and we want to stay that way. If you spot a factual error somewhere in the magazine (no, typos don't count) and you're the FIRST person to send in a postcard about it, you'll get a special prize and our thanks. If you're nice about it, that is....

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ANIMERICA GAFFE SQUAD

Please note these changes to the following issues:

Vol. 9, No. 1: The *ANIMERICA* EXTRA preview mistakenly inserted a picture of *Kamikaze Kaito Jeanne* instead of *Revolutionary Girl Utena*.

Those readers who wrote in with corrections, thanks for your help!

SPACE PIRATE WITH NO NAME

Thank you for the great information on *Space Pirate Captain Harlock* (Vol. 9, No. 3). This sounds like a fantastic anime adventure and I, for one, will enjoy a story about this one-eyed wonder and his starship. *Gun Frontier* really does sound like it has "shades of Clint Eastwood." Since I am a fan of Clint's classic movies like *Hang 'Em High*, *High Plains Drifter* and *Fistful of Dollars*, I will be checking this one out! —**Nannette "Nan" Wahleithner; Silhouet98@cs.com**

ROBOTECH MEMORIES

Do I remember *Robotech*? Of course. I began watching *Robotech* back when it first aired, in 1985. I watched the *Macross* saga without missing an episode, even though it was on at 6:00 in the morning. (I have to admit, however, that the *Macross* saga was my personal favorite.) I even had the opportunity to meet Carl Macek at a convention in November 1990. He managed to get booed by the audience when he said that he was not there to discuss *Robotech*—it was old news and another cartoon was on the horizon. The audience really did not like that, seeing that he had been promoted as having a discussion on *Robotech*. I left the convention with his autograph and a comment on the handmade Rick Hunter uniform jacket I was wearing. His exact words were, "Nice jacket." (Ah, the things we remember.) Needless to say *Robotech/Macross* is still one of my favorite cartoons and the art books are a big part of my collection.

And now on to Julie Davis's editorial in regard to violence in childrens' TV. I have said it once, and I will say it again: If parents think that something is too violent, they have the final word. Use your remote control to change the channel or turn it off. Children these days are unfortunate that the TV has become such a needed item. Growing up, I was more afraid of the old lady who takes Toto away from Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz* than of anything else I watched on TV. Personally, I think the news being reported today is more violent than any cartoon or TV program I watch or have ever watched.

—**Marika; Scifigal@netzero.net**

THE WAY OF ALL FLESH—COVERED UP!

Reading the editorial in Vol. 9, No. 2 regarding the editing of *Outlaw Star* made me think about how the subject of nudity in anime is handled with such prudishness here in America. In some ways, it's funny; in others, it's stupid—but it's all so terribly predictable.

The very first time I saw Melfina interface with Gene Starwind's pilfered spaceship, wearing what looked like a strapless black bra and matching bike pants, it didn't take long to figure out she was really naked and that the outfit had been retroactively added in the edited version of the show. An even more blatant case of after-the-fact editing is the bath scenes in *Tenchi Muyo!* where Ayeka, Ryoko, and the girls appear to be garbed in swimsuits—but in close-ups,

they are crudely added swatches of color made to look like swimsuits, but with no resemblance whatsoever to cloth—to cover their nudity.

The reason, at least in my eyes, for those instances of editorial cover-ups boils down to the general public's perception (or rather, misconception) of animation: that being that a cartoon is a cartoon is a cartoon. No matter how grown-up or sophisticated an animated series might be, nude females are a definite no-no because of our ever-present obsession to protect children from the "evils" of television. Copious amounts of violence and destruction are one thing, and the FCC for the most part is rather flexible on that, but exposed breasts are strictly forbidden when it comes to animation.

That demographic business regarding what age group watches animation plays a part as well. In the minds of John and Jane Q. Public, only kids watch animation—it's something adults shouldn't waste their time on. This I know firsthand from the odd looks I get when I tell coworkers or friends that I rush home every afternoon to watch *Sailor Moon* and that I never miss an episode of *The Powerpuff Girls* or *The Simpsons*. Because the majority of people incorrectly think that only kids watch animation, naughty things like naked females can't be shown for fear that innocent tykes might somehow be corrupted.

I think that's a load of crap myself. What would be more harmful for a child to watch: a naked Ayeka and Ryoko arguing in the bath over Tenchi or Goku blasting someone into next week with the Kamehameha? And don't think kids (more specifically, young boys) aren't always pretending or, in some cases, actually trying to punch each other's lights out, like they see happen on *Dragon Ball Z*. But in our openly prudish society, where sexuality is often frowned upon, if not feared, I believe people have fewer problems with kids watching violence than they do with the occasional display of feminine nudity.

And that mindset isn't going to change for a very long time, if ever, here in America, as long as our prehistoric opinions and discomfort regarding sexuality remain intact. I don't blame Cartoon Network for showing heavily edited anime—the very nature of its name suggests something only kids would be interested in. As long as people fall into the trap of that age-group demographic, CN has to be careful about what it shows and, more importantly, the content of its programming. The bottom line: Showing violence is okay, but showing boobs? Fuhgeddaboutit!!!!

—**Jeff Branch; treetop@voicenet.com**

TIME FOR TOLERANCE

I know that the battle between sub-fans and dub-fans will probably continue for years to come, but it seems to me it's getting truly ridiculous. I know that many fans out there share my feelings. For one thing, we all know that the dubbed versions of series are often tweaked for content and

ANIME & MANGA MONTHLY
ANIMERICA
ENVELOPE ART



Andrea Danielson • Petaluma, CA • Age 14



Kathy O'Hara • Anaheim Hills, CA



Katherine Hallberg • Pittsburgh, PA • Age 13



(No name) • Philadelphia, PA



the target audiences. That's a given. But does that always mean the dubs are terrible? Of course not. The dubbed versions of **Tenchi Muyo!** and **Outlaw Star** are fantastic, at least to me. The voices are some of the best I've ever heard, and the stories are still engaging and fun either way. Isn't that the point of watching anime in the first place? Personally, I can't stand the dub of **Sailor Moon**. Why? Well, for the English version, they not only changed the voices and all but changed relationships. Michelle and Amara as cousins? What in the world is up with that?! And the names...oh god, they're terrible. Serena? Uh...Usagi suits me just fine, as do Haruka, Michiru, Rei, Ami, Mamoru, Makoto, and Minako. If **Tenchi** can keep the real names, why couldn't **Sailor Moon**, huh? Give me the unedited **Sailor Stars** series anyway. But I'm really okay with dubs in general. So why can't everyone else be?

And, on another note, a few issues back you printed a letter from a girl who was insulted at an anime con. What the hell?! Ripping other *otaku* to shreds isn't going to make them love your favorite shows, people. Get a clue. I can't count the times I've told people that I enjoy anime, only to get a blank stare and an incredulous, "You?" Um, for some reason they can't believe that a girl of African-American heritage enjoys anything other than...well, y'know, stereotypes. So, *otaku*, unite! There are enough problems in the world without infighting.

Oh, and my friend and I were having a discussion a few days ago, and she stated that there were few multicultural anime shows or even different races in manga and the like. Is this true? And if anyone mentions Mr. Popo from **Dragon Ball Z**, I'll kill them.
—Dana Byam, age 16; lifein nirvana@aol.com; Bronx, NY

While it's true that many anime series seem pretty "racially consistent" (even though anime characters are sometimes hard to recognize as Japanese), it's also true that plenty of anime series, particularly a lot of '80s sci-fi, feature multicultural casts. Claudia in Macross (Robotech) and Nadia and Nemo in Nadia, The Secret of Blue Water are just of couple of examples that come to mind, and of course, there are many more. Maybe we should do a longer article on this topic, huh?

THIS AND THAT

In Vol. 9, No. 2, Jeff Branch ("More on Escaflowne and Anime on Saturday Morning") was right when he said he risked invoking a stereotype. I am a male (and proud of it), and I watch anime for the story as much as anything else, if not more so. I love anime

and manga with plots, subplots, etc., but I also like the other stuff. I was as frustrated as anybody when Kids WB renamed **Cardcaptor Sakura** and started about eight episodes into the series, skipping a few good cards and stories. I never saw **Escaflowne** because it wasn't on at a good time for me to see it, so I can't talk about why I think it was taken off. But I hope that somebody picks it up and shows it so that I can see it because I have heard good things about it.

In response to Sigel Phoenix's letter, "Suddenly Shōnen Ai," I have to agree with the comment that *shōnen ai* (boys' love) is as much a part of anime as, say, *shōjo ai* (girls' love). While I am not a fan of *shōnen ai*, one of my favorite anime, **Fake**, is *shōnen ai*, if not light *yaoi* (gay). I was slightly disturbed by this at first, but after a few minutes of it, the story won me over. Going back to Jeff's letter. People who have seen **Sailor Moon** in the original Japanese know that Zoicite is a guy and not a girl. Also, most **SM** fans already know that Amara and Michelle (Haruka and Michiru) are lesbians, not cousins. (Although I did wonder how that would be explained on American TV. Can't wait to see the Starlights explained).

I also have to agree with Psycho Mantis about *otaku*. Almost anyone can call themselves one, but are they really? I think I can, but that has caused me a bit of ridicule at school. I often see people write in, complaining that they aren't understood by their friends or are made fun of, but how many of you out there have been asked if you're devil worshippers? While this did bug me some, I didn't let it affect my *otakuness* (can that be a word?). I just shrugged it off as best I could, and went on my merry way. Also, I think that *otaku* should be more open-minded about what they watch and read, not just stick with one genre or title. My manga collection has a little bit of everything, from **Pokémon** (the Toshihiro Ono series) and **Cardcaptor Sakura** to **Ranma 1/2** and **Maxxion**. I'm not saying that everyone should go out and spend their money as I have, but be more open-minded about what other anime fans like. At the moment, I'm waiting for someone to put out **Rurouni Kenshin** and **Trigun** manga. Well, I think I've wasted enough of your time, so keep up the good work. Also, please print my e-mail address. I'd like to hear from other *otaku* and people who'd just like to talk anime.

—Will Jamborsky, Nashville, TN;
mrslorajr@aol.com

UTENA: BETTER THAN I EXPECTED

I wanted to let you know that I have enjoyed reading

your magazine for some time now. Your feature articles and reviews have really helped me pick out some good anime titles, so I see you guys as a real valuable asset. The best article that piqued my interest was your first article on **Revolutionary Girl Utena**. By the way, the series was better than I expected. The **Tenchi** series, you helped me sort through. There are many others, but those two come to mind while I am writing. The recent interviews with Chiho Saito and Kunihiro Ikuhara were good as well. Personally, I'd like to see more of the **RGU** TV show. I'm following the manga published in **EXTRA**. Keep up the great work, and I'll keep buying more issues of **ANIMERICA**.
—Stacy2530@aol.com

UTENA: IS IT REALLY THAT GOOD?

I am writing this in reference to issues Vol. 8, No. 12, which featured an article on **Revolutionary Girl Utena**, and Vol. 9, No. 1, which featured a cover story on **Vampire Hunter D**. In the **Utena** issue, which included an interview with the director, readers were well informed on the **Utena** series. Unfortunately, in my opinion, we were blasted with the same info in the next issue. It was another interview, in which he said some of the same things! What a waste! Is **Utena** so spectacular that we have to receive two large articles, instead of the single article that most cover stories get? What about more **D**? Or **Captain Tylor**? Or some other series. I am not dissing **Utena** or anything like that, though I personally do not like the show. But give something else a chance. It was almost as if you were using it as filler. Well, I've said my piece.

—Manji, Bradley Erickson; virus13e@yahoo.com;
5170 Alcovia Rt. Box 3, Casper, WY 82604

Regarding the interviews in the two issues you mention, in the first one, Chiho Saito, the manga artist for Utena, did most of the talking, so we wanted to talk to the director, Kunihiro Ikuhara, separately. We felt that the two interviews were different enough that running them back-to-back wouldn't be a problem, especially since Mr. Ikuhara's interview in Vol. 9, No. 1 contained much more about his career in general than Utena specifically. And frankly, since we did single out the Utena movie as one of our "Best of the Best" in Vol. 8, No. 12, I guess you'd have to say we DO think it's that spectacular. ☆



Amanda Hunn • Traverse City, MI



Julie Moore • Elkins Park, PA



Antonio Gutierrez • Riverside, CA



Minjoo Cha • Okemos, MI • Age 12



Sonya de la Cerda • Colfax, CA • Age 13

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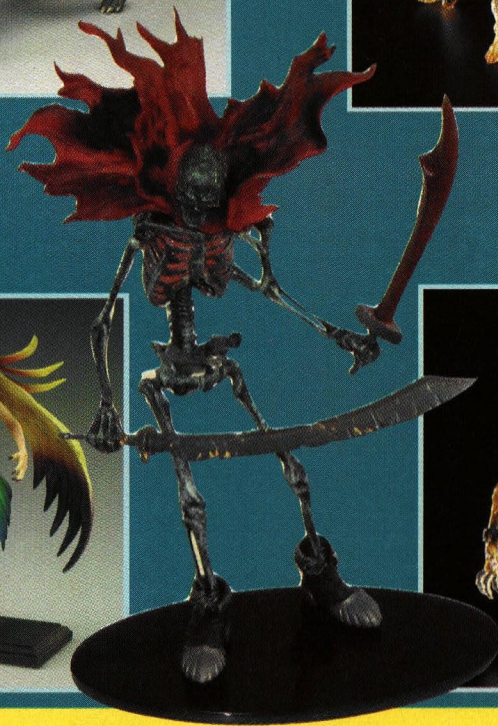
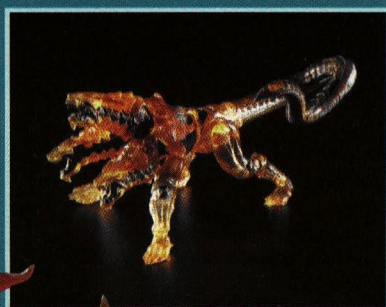
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ANIMERICA CONTEST

We give away free swag every month in a drawing from all readers who sent in their readers' response cards (those inserts in the front of the mag). If you wanna win too, you've gotta send in your card to enter the drawing for videos, comics, all sorts of cool stuff!

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One of three sets of *Final Fantasy* action figures from Koto, Inc.!



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Just pull your readers' response card out of the magazine, fill it out, fold it over, tape it shut, stick a stamp on it, and send it to us! You don't have to subscribe or anything—you're automatically entered to win! (Make sure to put your e-mail address on the card if you want to receive special information from Koto, Inc. about new releases!)

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25 June 2001

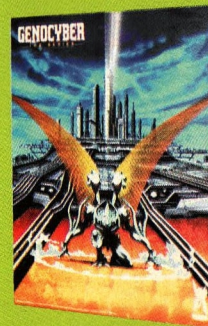
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No purchase necessary. Employees of Koto, Inc., Viz Communications, Inc. and those associated with ANIMERICA magazine are ineligible to enter. Winners' names will be announced in the magazine. All prizes will be sent out following the winners' notification. Viz Communications is not responsible for lost, late, misdirected or mutilated entries. Winners will be selected by random drawing by the staff of ANIMERICA. Good luck!

THIS MONTH'S WINNERS

Here are the winners from our "grab bag of goodies" contest in Vol. 9, No. 3!

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Ty Lewis • Sumas, WA
Luis Franco • Vineland, NJ
Andrew Caddock • Minneapolis, MN
Danielle Stachewicz • Phelps, WI
Sean P. McGahee • Woodstock, GA
Audry Taylor • Encino, CA
Justice Hovary • Antioch, CA
Virginia Palaszewski • Milwaukee, WI
Marcus Brown • Newcomb, NM
Adhitya S. Pramana • Bryan, TX
Brandon Walters • Springfield, LA
Amy Duengfelder • Lakeview, NY
Maria Elena Gray • Edmond, OK
Nicole Bouchard • E. Lansing, MI
Greg Lloyd • Cornell, IL
John Lindgren • E. North Port, NY
Lyn Nguyen • Cape Coral, FL
Elliot Strom • Mankato, MN
Cedric Bynam • New Haven, CN
Colton Page • Winchester, IN



Look at all the stuff we had lying around! Winners will receive a surprise assortment from this stash and more, including T-shirts and posters!

More Winners Next Month!

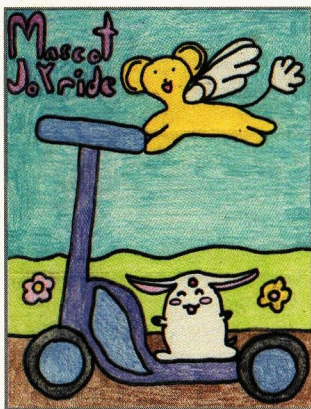
ON A SCOOTER



Dorothy Yang • Dartmouth, N.S., Canada • Age 15



Brian Wong • San Francisco, CA • Age 17



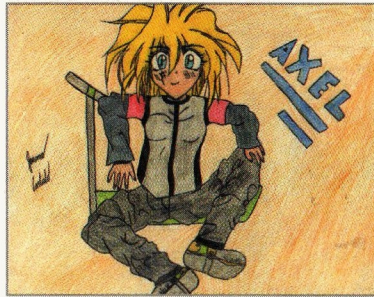
Jamee Warfle • Arden, NC • Age 21



Alexandra Pytlak
Richfield, MN • Age 15



Karlene Allred • Medford, OR • Age 17



Joanna Carlisle • Copperas Cove, TX • Age 13



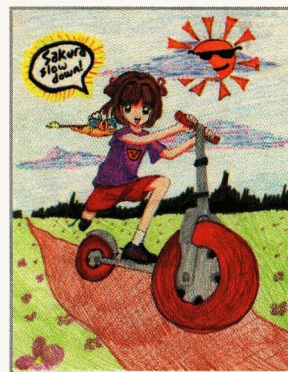
Emily Bracamonte • Tucson, AZ • Age 14



Roberto Gutiérrez Carranza • Clarkton, NC • Age 23



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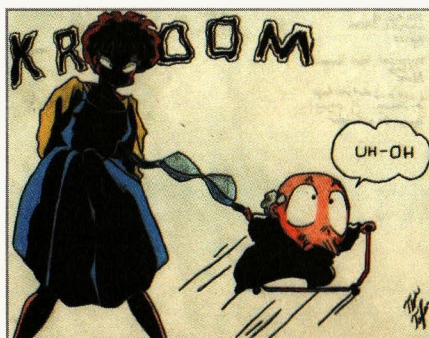
David Palacias • Riverside, CA • Age 19



Amanda Erwin • Anchorage, AK • Age 18



Davin Harsadi • Dothan, AL • Age 16



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Marc McKenzie • Hillsborough, NJ • Age 28



Erin Morris • Lorton, VA • Age 15



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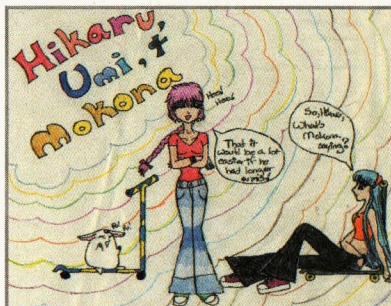
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Kindra Flavin • Louisville, CO • Age 13



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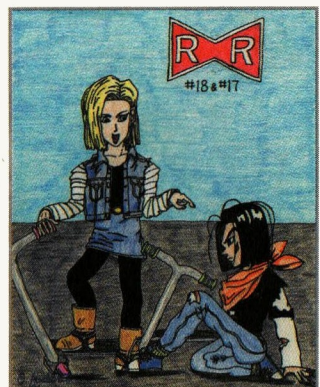
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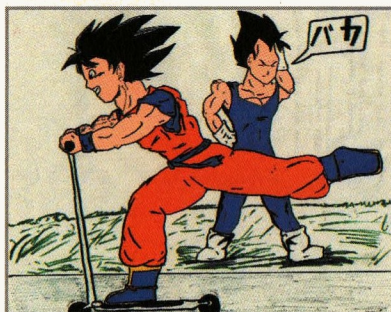
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Details: Make your artwork **no larger than 8 1/2" x 11"**. No e-mail entries. Send your illustrations by postal mail. Please do not fold. Color illustrations are preferred to black-and-white. Artwork will not be returned. If you don't want to send your originals, color copies work just fine! **Clearly label** each piece of your artwork **on the back** with your **name, address, age**, and the name of the character you're illustrating.

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Vol. 9, No. 6

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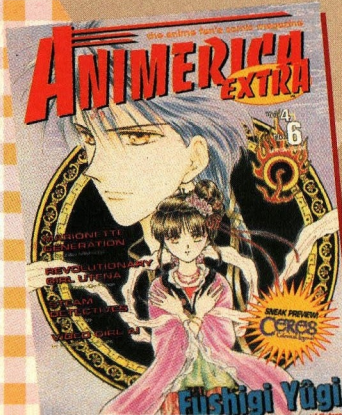
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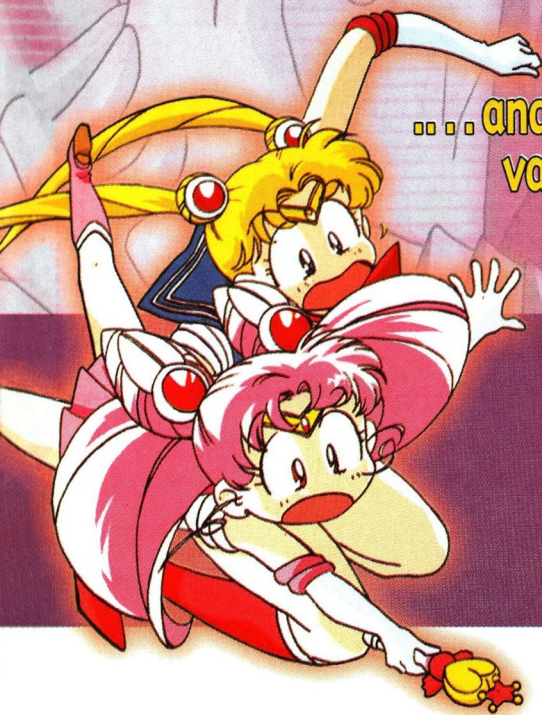


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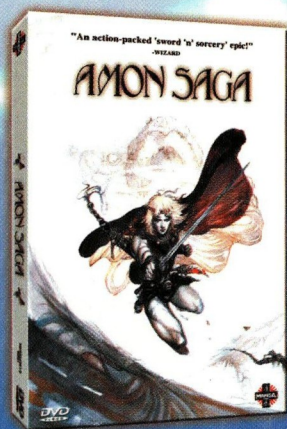
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